OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE



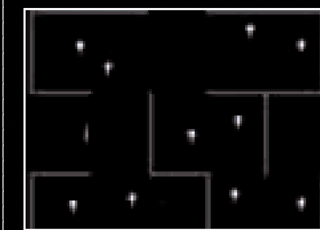
SENSIBLE SOCCER

THE GREATEST FOOTY GAME EVER FINALLY SCORES ON LIVE ARCADE

THE MAKING OF...

BERZERK

BEHIND THE SCENES OF ONE OF THE EIGHTIES' MOST EXCITING BLASTERS



WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

EXCLUSIVE NEW INTERVIEW!

ELITE

DAVID BRABEN AND IAN BELL LOOK BACK AT 24 YEARS OF SPACE TRADING



THE BIG REVIEW

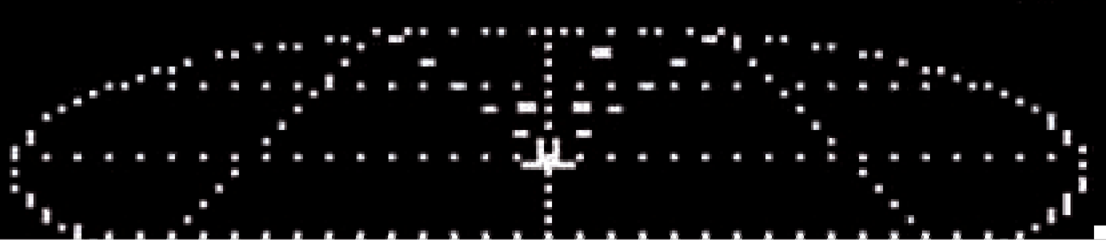
MYST

CAN THE HIT PC GAME SECURE A NEW HOME ON NINTENDO'S DS?

RETROINSPECTION

ATARI 800XL

THE 8-BIT WONDER EVERYONE FORGETS



PLAYING GOD

WILL WRIGHT

THE MASTER OF SIMULATED LIFE LOOKS BACK AT HIS FASCINATING CAREER

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

RISTAR
PROOF THAT GREAT PLATFORMERS DON'T NEED BLUE HEDGEHOGS

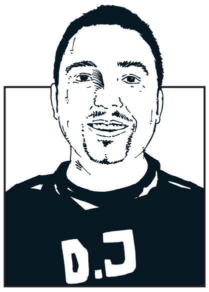
POKÉMON SNAP
HOW THE CREATIVE USE OF A SCIENCE TURNED INTO AN N64 SMASH HIT

ELECTRONIC ARTS
DISCOVER WHAT THE HIT PUBLISHER WAS GETTING UP TO IN THE NINETIES

MAGIC CARPET
UP UP AND AWAY WITH THE PC'S CEREBRAL SHOOTER

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE DRIVING GAME



DARRAN JONES

OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast. Simply the greatest racing game ever created. The fact it comes with *OutRun 2* makes it even better. If only it was old enough to include in our top 25 racers.

Expertise: Hiding my worrying high-definition obsession from my wife
Currently playing:
Rez HD
Favourite game of all time:
Boulder Dash Rocks!



DAVID CROOKES

Although I had a huge fixation with *Ridge Racer* on the PSone, *Power Drift*, *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* and *Supercars* jostled for attention during my impressionable youth and they all deserve to be in pole position.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Super Mario Galaxy
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



STUART HUNT

I think I'll have to hand the accolade to *Sega Rally*. Sublime, simple and seriously good fun, a brilliant arcade game and one of the best arcade conversions ever made.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Tomb Raider: Anniversary
Favourite game of all time:
Boulder Dash Rocks!



MIKE TOOLEY

A tough call, but for the sheer adrenaline and the fact that it has kept me grinning for over ten years, I would have to say *Daytona USA*, raw and awesome.

Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing:
Phantasy Star Universe
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!



PAUL DRURY

Virtua Racing. The bird's eye view always made me feel like God playing Scalextric.

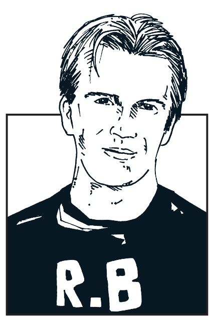
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Boogie
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

For the pure joy of flinging yourself at breakneck speeds along beautiful tracks, without faffing about with so-called real-world physics, *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* fits the bill.

Expertise: Games you don't need 37 fingers to control.
Currently playing:
Being constantly ill
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

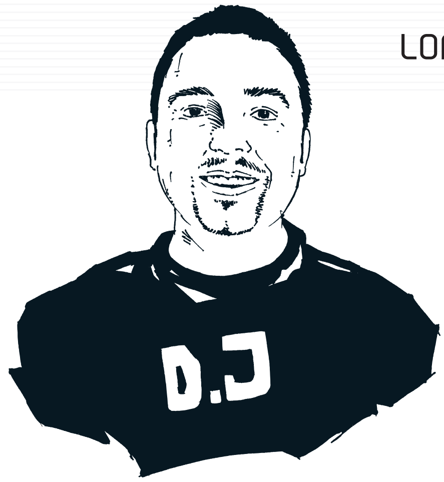


RICHARD BURTON

Super Mario Kart on the SNES. Superb one-player gaming, even better in two-player Battle Mode. *Mario Kart* practically invented the karting genre and it's still yet to be surpassed. Faultless.

Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
Rastan Saga
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...



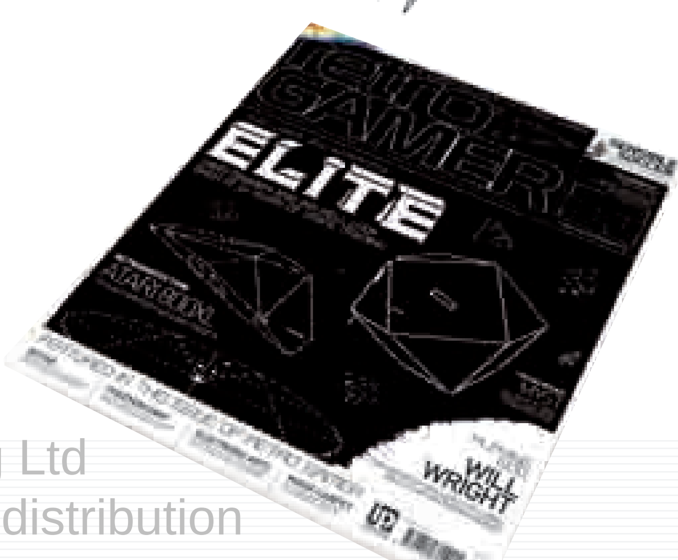
We're not one for following trends at Retro Gamer, so when we had the chance to create a pure black-and-white cover (potential suicide for any other gaming mag) we immediately knew what would grace it.

Despite being nearly 25 years old now, David Braben and Ian Bell's *Elite* remains an incredibly immersive experience and arguably did the 'Sandbox' gaming thing long before the likes of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Crackdown*. Beautiful to look at, and offering a level of depth that few other games of the time could compete with, it's hardly surprising that fans are still clamouring for a fourth outing.

Of course, we can appreciate that not every retro gamer is going to be a fan of *Elite*, so we've done our best to make sure that this latest issue is as jam-packed as possible. Those not wanting to read about wireframe graphics and space trading will still find plenty to enjoy. This month's making ofs cover *Chip's Challenge*, *Magic Carpet* and Stern's excellent *Berzerk*, while our top 25 racing games are bound to upset a few *OutRun* fans. As always, when we're not writing the magazine Stuart and myself can usually be found on the forums, so don't be afraid to let your opinion be heard.

Enjoy the magazine

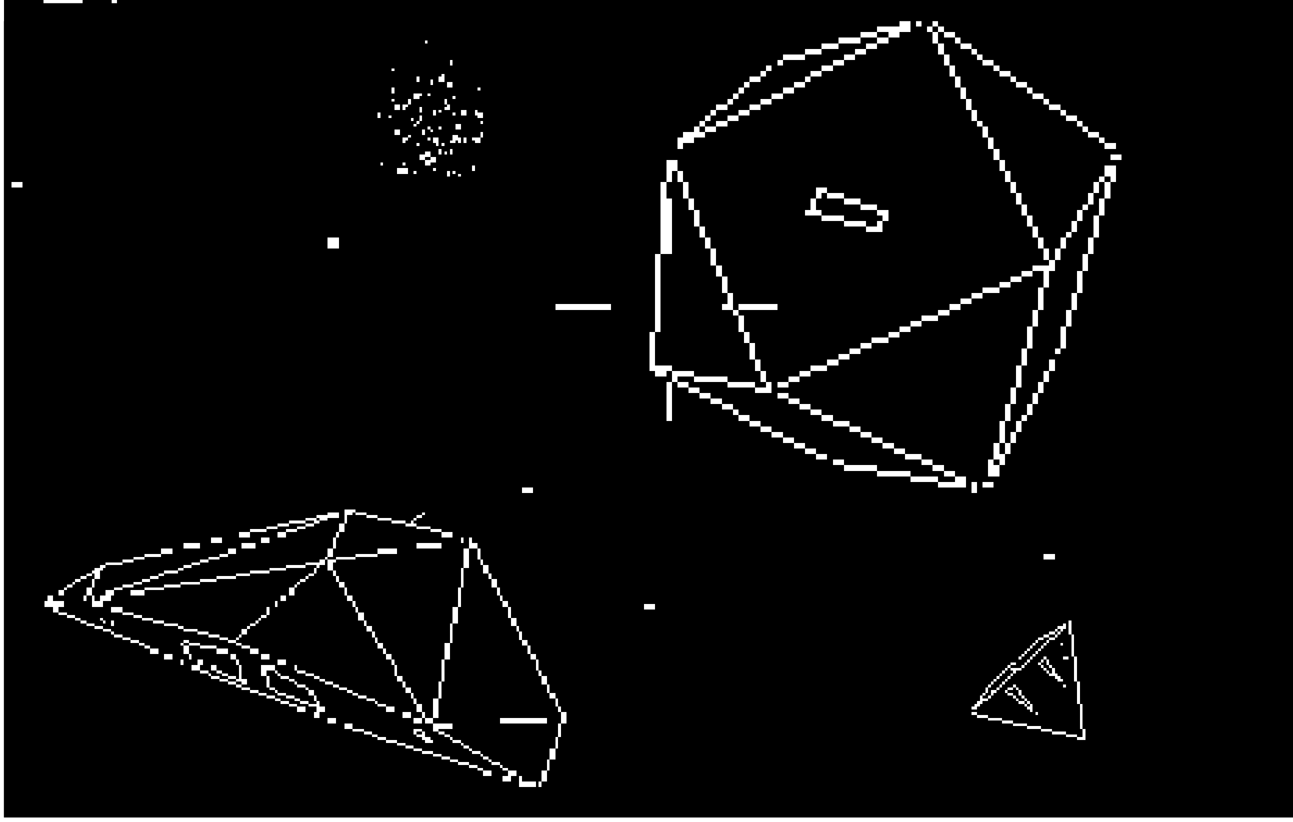


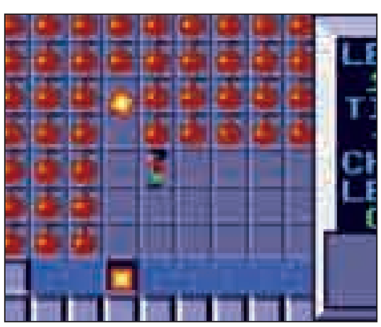


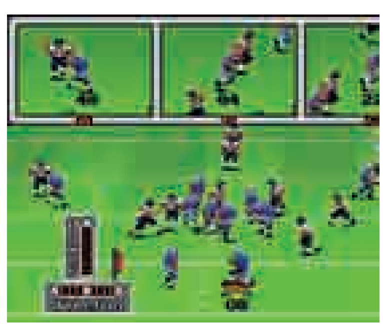


CONTENTS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES









INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…

CONTENTS

ESSENTIALS

IN THE CHAIR WITH... WILL WRIGHT



THE BIG FEATURE



RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



SUBSCRIBE TO RETRO GAMER

Can't stand the thought of missing the next marvellous edition of **Retro Gamer**? Then simply head on over to our subscriptions pages and place your order now!

p102







THE MAKING OF...

FLYING CARPET

RETROINSPECTION

ATARI 800XL

THE TOP 25...

RACERS

THE GUIDE

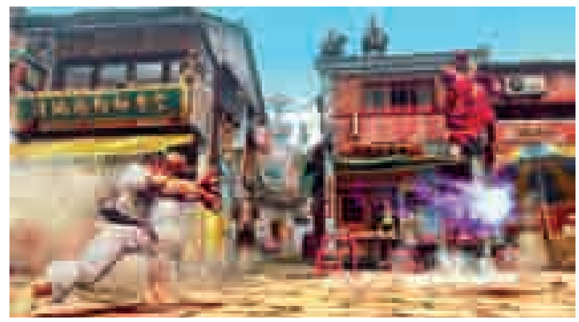
What's hot this issue…

STREET FIGHTING TALK

CAPCOM FINALLY STARTS REVEALING DETAILS ABOUT ITS EXCITING NEW BEAT-'EM-UP



This looks like it's going to be painful.



This *Street Fighter* screenshot had us frothing at the mouth in excitement.

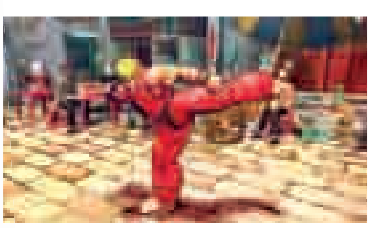
Ironic, isn't it? In the Nineties, every time a new edition to the *Street Fighter* nest was christened with the first name *Street Fighter II*, a global sigh resonated around the entire gaming industry. And now here we are, on the dawn of a new *Street Fighter* game and in the back of minds, secretly, we hope that this new game is a complete unabashed homage to that prolific second game in the franchise.

Thankfully, we can confirm that *Street Fighter IV* will play out in 2D. This has been confirmed by Yoshinori Ono, the game's producer. The early screens and cryptic colour-sapping brush stroke trailer offered us our first glimpse of the game, and we haven't stopped talking about it since. The latest sinewy shots floating across the web, showing a lucid spat between stalwart street fighter's Ryu and Ken in a busy marketplace that has more than a slight air of Chun Li's home stage has us truly excited and confident about promises that *Street Fighter IV* will be a love letter to *Street Fighter II*. To help pen the romantic prose the quill has been passed back to Japan, from the US, and into the watchful clasp of many of the team responsible for knocking that prolific sequel out of the park. On top of this, certain aspects of the game have been outsourced, away from Capcom. Is that really a good idea? We'll there's no reason why it shouldn't be, after all, just look at what Sumo Digital has brought to the *OutRun* series and WayForward to the *Contra* franchise.

While the overly exaggerated look of the two iconic brawlers has come in for a bit of flack recently across a few forums, there is no denying that the game looks special. The graphics almost demonstrate a peculiar old-school treatment to new-school aesthetics. The colourful cartoon boldness and the immense level of detail and depth looks set to allow *Street Fighter IV* to look and play poles apart from any other 3D-fighting franchise that has come before, while retaining that all-important tactile 2D quality that makes the game so special – a notion that Ono promises will also be fused into its gameplay.

The only characters we have seen so far are Ryu and Ken, but it's reputed that Chun-Li, E Honda and Zangief will also find their faces on the character-select screen. How far back Capcom is planning to go into the series remains to be seen, but we wouldn't be against it being a re-imagining of sorts.

Despite the look of the game owing much to the over-sized character models of *Street Fighter III*, Ono has also admitted that the game's parry system will be dropped. In its place will stand a new function called 'saving'. This function will allow characters to read and open up their opponents' defences at ground level, working in a similar way to the well-used aerial breach of strong kick, counter sweep and special. Players will now have the opportunity to literally square up to their opponent and yield an opening for attacks at ground level. This, Ono hopes, will bring the game down a peg or two, prevent players dominating rounds with supers, draw the fighters closer together and create a more realistic feel to the fighting. While under the spell of 'saving', your character is granted temporary invulnerability, a hint that this game will be hoping to push the series back so it's easier for new players. This won't be to everyone's taste, in the same way that the huge thighs and tightly woven arse graphics on the in-game fighters have had some spitting venom. We'll update you with more news when we get it.



Looking good, Ken, looking good.



Even Ryu's excited about *Street Fighter IV*.

HERO OF THE MONTH



BARBARIAN

Every month, **Retro Gamer** looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of *Barbarian*

First appearance: *Barbarian*

Distinguishing features: Furry Pants

Weapon of choice: Broadsword

Most likely to: Hack your face off

Least likely to: Get a job as a hairdresser

Interesting fact: Wolf from Gladiators (aka Michael Van Wijk) posed for the *Barbarian* cover art.

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 31: PETER SHILTON'S HANDBALL MARADONA



Assuming you failed to register its moronic title on the box, this comic-looking lead-in – showing a hand glued to the side of a football – would have had you assuming that this game is a comical depiction of footy violence. It's not, it's a colour-hating game of World Cup instead.

JUST IN JAY IS GAMES HAS JUST LAUNCHED ITS FIFTH ANNUAL DESIGN A GAME COMPETITION. IF YOU LIKE DESIGNING IN FLASH HEAD TO JAYISGAMES.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION. COMP ENDS 03 MARCH 08

SEGA DIRECT CLOSES DOORS

SEGA DIRECT SADLY BITES THE DUST, AND THEN FOR SOME GOOD NEWS

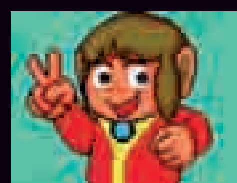


As you've probably guessed, at *Retro Gamer* we really love Sega. Not in any kind of creepy pervy window-licker way, we just hold a lot of nostalgic love for the company. Especially as it seems to be continually tapping back into its retro routes of late. So, it's with heavy hearts we announce that Sega Direct – the best place to purchase weird and wonderful Sega-related merchandise – will be closing its door permanently in March. Sega Direct was incepted during the release of the ill-fated Dreamcast and has been going strong for eight years since. It was the final software garrison for the machine and can now be remembered as its final resting place.

Fortunately there is some good Sega news this month, however, news which might put a smile on a few of those cheerless Sega fan faces: two more characters have been announced for Sumo's *Sega Superstars Tennis*. Who are they? Well, here are some clues: one is a goggle-wearing, rollerblading graffiti artist who appeared in a game that sounds like 'Get Set Baby-O' and the other is a diamond-eyed jester that moves like an acrobat and pops up in emotionally unstable kids' dreams.

SEGA TENNIS CONTENDERS

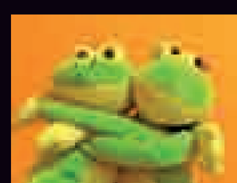
HERE ARE A FEW SEGA CHARACTERS THAT HAVE YET TO BE CONFIRMED IN SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS. SEGA AND SUMO, LISTEN UP AND MAKE IT HAPPEN



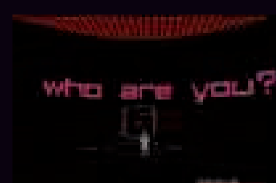
ALEX KIDD While his big head, puffy fists and tiny legs running around a tennis court could prove a physical disaster for the Alex Kidd, we'd still love to see the monkey man return for one more Sega outing.



THE FERRARI FROM OUTRUN Look, Sega put a Daytona stock car into *Fighters Megamix*, so why not an open-top Testarossa in a tennis game? The car has a fear of advertising signs, which could be a problem.



FROGGY Yes, *Sonic Adventure*'s most ridiculous section: the retrieval of a cat's pet frog. Put him in his own game and serve him up for this tennis adventure – perhaps then we can put those *Adventure* demons to rest.

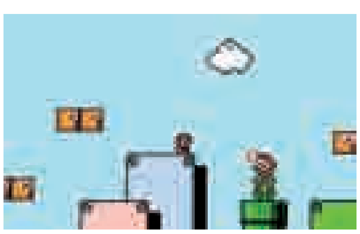


AVATAR IN REZ We were taken aback by how great *Rez* looked in HD. We haven't been able to put it down, whiling away the hours listening to trance beats while trying to work out how to jam a trance vibrator into a 360 control port.

THE GREAT NINTENDO GIVEAWAY

WITH THE NINTENDO Wii, POINTS WIN PRIZES

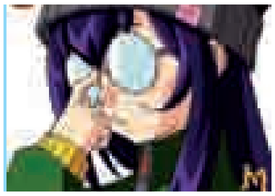
Whether it be five per cent of a Mars Bar, a thousand pounds of apples or a lovelorn credit festering inside an arcade machine, free stuff is great. And if you're the owner of a Wii you'll soon have the chance to claim some free retro games through the purchase of some non-retro games. Nintendo Europe has recently announced that Star Points – which players unlock by registering their Wii games online – can be stored and exchanged for Wii Points. While Wii Points are the currency of the Wii Shop – the place where retro games and upgrades for your Wii can be bought – Stars were more akin to lame gift vouchers for a naff souvenir shop – forcing you to spend your wares on tat like Nintendo wallpaper and ringtones. Of course, now these Star Points hold plenty more clout in allowing you to trade them for Points and so purchase a few classic retro games for your console. Currently, the exchange rate is four stars for one point – which isn't too paltry in our eyes. Now if only Microsoft could follow suit with Gamer Points and swap the exchange rate around, we'd be very happy.







LAST-MINUTE NEWS



SHOOT-'EM-UP CRAZY

THE GOOD, THE GOOD AND THE GOOD

It almost feels like the world's gone shmup crazy. This generation of console gaming feels like a retro-wall has been well and truly levelled, with almost daily news coming to us that underplayed, quirky Japanese titles are finding a re-release. The latest effort is a triple hitter from Milestone with the news that it's planning to re-release its three chaotic shooters: *Karous* (Arcade and Dreamcast), *Radirgy* and *Chaos Field* (GameCube). All will find themselves taking to the bullet-riddled skies for an exclusive Wii triple pack released in Japan in March. Although *Radirgy* was penciled in for a US release later on in the year, there's sadly no news about the compilation ever finding one – but if we hear anything, you'll be the first to know.

DRAGON'S LAIR NEEDS YOU!

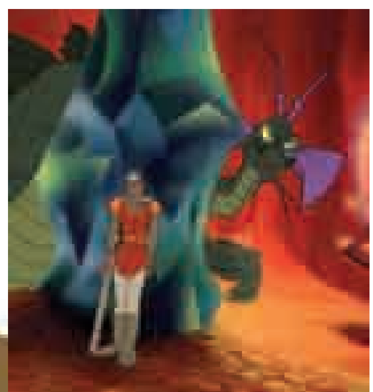


DEVELOPER SEEKS FUNDING FOR PSP VERSION

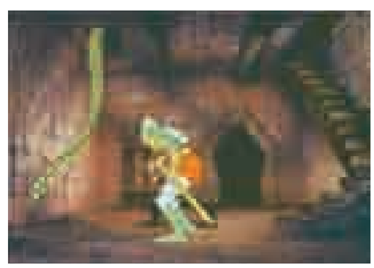
When *Dragon's Lair* hit the arcades in 1983 it caused a stir. Graphically, it was peerless, but that might have had something to do with the fact that it was the first full-animation Laserdisc videogame. Sure, its home ports varied in quality and faithfulness (don't even get us started on that nonsensical NES port), but as a whole the game has become a well-loved franchise that holds a great deal of nostalgic appeal for many across the world. Well, some of you may be aware that the game is soon to be making an appearance on the DS, and this news obviously got us all clammy – especially as the stylus controls would certainly lend themselves well to the nature of the game.

United Coders, developer of the Nintendo DS version of the game, are currently putting the finishing touches to this version, but are also seeking a publisher for a version of the game on the Sony PSP. In exchange for funding the development and intellectual property costs of *Dragon's Lair* for the Sony PSP, the publisher will be granted the global publishing rights for the format. United Coders expects to begin development of *Dragon's Lair* for the PSP in February. So if you think you can bankroll the PSP publishing duties, feel free to give the company a call.





The graphics were unbelievable when it was released.

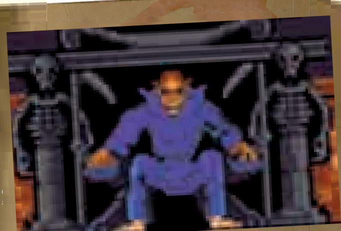


Dragon's Lair should work brilliantly on the DS.



Back to the start with you.

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



DRAX

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without bad villains there would be no good heroes. What would Batman be without the Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Complete rubbish, that's what. This month: Drax

First appearance: *Barbarian*

Distinguishing features: Balding

Weapon of choice: Cold glare

Most Likely to: Wear a toupee

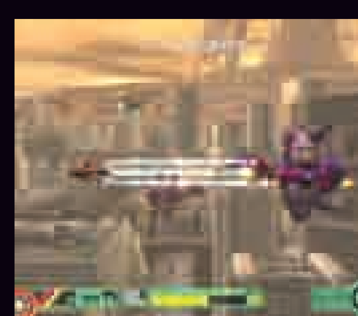
Least likely to: Appear in a shampoo ad

Unusual fact: Drax was so nervous during the Maria Whittaker cover shoot that he locked himself in the bog until the game was finally released.

ACROSS THE BORDER DOWN... AGAIN

AMAZING DREAMCAST SHMUP GETS REISSUED

Although Sega's Giga Disc ROM is sadly no longer with us, it appears there's still a few of the chunky shiny discs lingering around on the planet. This can only really be a good thing, of course, as it means we can fill our front pages with brilliant news of reissues like this: the sublime multiple-choice Dreamcast blaster *Border Down*. For those that haven't yet had the chance to play the game, and are probably looking for a summation, *Border Down* is a side/horizontal-scrolling blaster that's absolutely stunning to look at. Its peculiar title comes from the game's unique concept of difficulty: the player can pick certain different routes (borders) to progress through each of the game's stages, which, in turn, influence the number of, and the fire-ratio, of the enemies ships. It's all a bit too complicated to try to stuff inside this small news story – so a far better idea would be for you to take our word on how brilliant *Border Down* actually is and to get online and import yourself a copy.



Border Down is well worth picking up; gorgeous to look at and absolutely awesome to play.

THE GALLERY

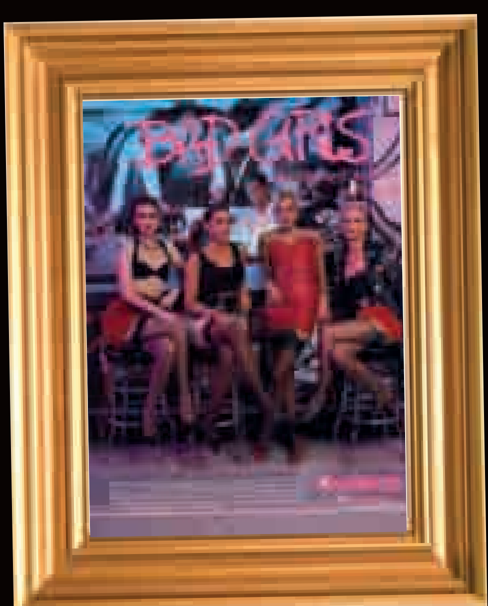
THIS MONTH WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE PINBALL FLYERS THAT HELPED SELL THOSE GAME-THEMED MACHINES THAT STUART CAMPBELL LOOKED AT IN ISSUE 45



STREET FIGHTER II
Released 1993
Does it sell the cab?
Er, okay, so what happened to poor old Chunners? First there's the breasts that completely defy biology. The face looks like it's been on the receiving end of several Psycho Crushers. Of course, the popularity of the arcade game itself will have ensured that Gottlieb still managed to sell a ton of these anyway. But this? Really?
What's cool about it?
The fact that it's hawking something associated with *Street Fighter II* kind of gives this flyer immunity from being a complete piece of eye gunk.
What's naff about it?
The lazy burrowing of the cab's artwork for Chun-Li. Surely a picture of her manly muscular thighs crushing the cab into a small ball bearing would have been a better shout?



BABY PAC-MAN
Released 1982
Does it sell the cab?
Why it's Baby Pac-Man… well, a small Pac-Man in a pink bonnet. This flyer art doesn't look likes it's trying to promote a pinball machine. Finding the game's connection to pinball is a cryptic endeavour, but there are clues. The Bally logo, the fact that Pac-Child looks like a yellow ball-bearing, and the storks in the background obviously symbolise some multi-ball feature.
What's cool about it?
When printed onto a piece of A4 paper it makes a great retro knitting pattern.
What's naff about it?
Well, it doesn't really scream pinball, does it? More effort could have been employed to make the fact known. Perhaps ditching a few of those storks for a couple of pinball cabs?



BAD GIRLS
Released 1988
Does it sell the cab?
Yes, we know Campbell didn't include this game in his pinball feature, but when we spotted this we felt it would be a crime against hairspray and leg tattoos not to include it. Pinball gets a ticket to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* after party with Gottlieb's *Bad Girls*. This welcoming quartet of ladies appear to get so hot when indulgeing in pinball that their clothes shrink.
What's cool about it?
It gives some insight into what Cyndi Lauper's 21st birthday party might have been like.
What's naff about it?
Again Gottlieb has opted to boot out any sign of pinball, this time insisting on showing four ladies getting in the way of any poor sap actually trying to reach the bar to buy some alcohol.



SUPER MARIO BROS
Released 1992
Does it sell the cab?
This is some great artwork, aside from the fact that Gottlieb has Mario and Luigi's hair colour all muddled up. The flyer shows a 'Delboy and Rodney' moment that occurred when Mario and Luigi were moving their new pinball table into their games room and Luigi dropped the corner of the table onto his brother's right foot and sliced his toes off. Shocked by the sudden influx of pain, Mario tells Luigi to steal the spare foot from his scoreboard artwork and surgically apply it to his bloody fleshy mess foot with silicon and washers.
What's cool about it?
It's Chuckle Bros meets Mario Bros meets a day in casualty.
What's naff about it?
Look, the hair mix up just bugs us – get it sorted, Gottlieb.

Retro Gamer DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



FEBRUARY 08

NEW INTERNATIONAL TRACK & FIELD

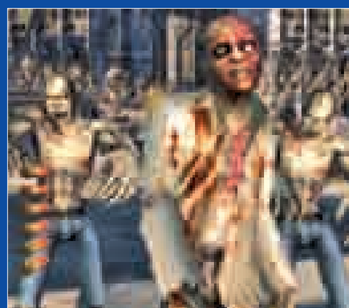
Released: 22 February

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Sumo Digital certainly likes its sports games. As well as working on *Sega Superstars Tennis*, it's also adding the finishing touches to this re-imagining of Konami's classic sports franchise. Seeing a super-deformed Pyramid Head from the *Silent Hill* series has sparked a lot of interest, so let's see what other characters will be announced.



FEBRUARY 08

HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 & 3 RETURN

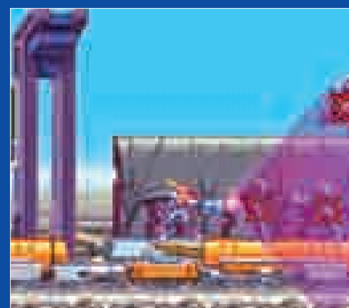
Released: 28 February

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Capcom's *The Umbrella Chronicles* proved that the Wii is quite capable of survival-horror. Breaking away from *Ballamory*-gaming, it is the console for short, sharp intakes of unfettered arcade action. Sega is wise to this fact and is bringing its sublime horror series *House Of The Dead* to Wii. We're just gutted it's not a standalone adventure.



FEBRUARY 08

MEGA MAN ZX ADVENT

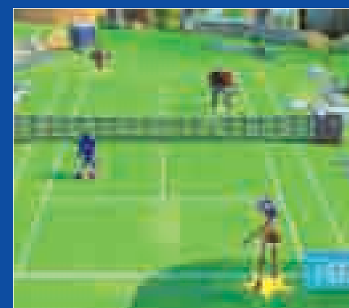
Released: 29 February

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Mega Man may not get swathes of screaming female fans and perfumed parchments of wedding proposals with Western gamers any more, but in the East his blue Y-fronts are still a national treasure. Capcom has announced that he will be getting a second DS outing, so expect more portable run-and-gun tag action, plus a function that apparently lets you morph into fallen bosses.



FEBRUARY 08

SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS

Released: 29 February

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99-£49.99

Format: PS3, Wii, 360, PS3, DS

Capcom once dominated our Diary page, earning all our love, but this month we pledge our love to Sega. *Superstars Tennis* looks set to include a host of characters ranging from Sonic to some charming primates from *Super Monkey Ball*. Best of all, though, is the return of *Space Channel 5*'s Ulala. Up, down, up, down, serve, serve, serve.



MARCH 08

WORMS: A SPACE ODDITY

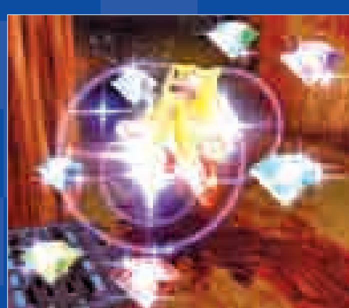
Released: March

Publisher: THQ

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Worms? Worming its way onto Wii? It was inevitable really. Fast forward a few thousand years to when humans are born with game consoles implanted in their retinas, and the phrase 'I recently picked up *Worms*' will have two very different meanings. Until then, however, the latest iteration promises us new-look wrigglers, party games, and a plethora of old and new play modes. We just hope the controls get a hefty shot of sensible.



MARCH 08

SUPER SMASH BROS MELEE

Released: March

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

Yes, it's frustrating that the damned thing keeps getting pushed back, but it's hard to complain when the end result could well be the most comprehensive battler ever. The latest news from the *Super Smash Bros* grapevine is that Diddy Kong and Sonic are now playable characters and that it will include a level select with a brand-new level available for download each day. We are bursting with joy.



MARCH 08

SEGA BASS FISHING

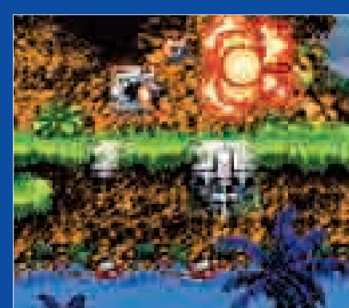
Released: 23 March (US)

Publisher: Sega

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

While there's little doubt that a fishing game will work immaculately on Wii, we can't help wondering why Sega is bothering with a bass game. We all know that the bass is the most dreary of fish – not as smart as a perch and lacking the killer instinct of a pike. Worst of all, they became really arrogant after the original arcade game was such a hit, and are apparently already making ridiculous demands. Stupid fish.



MARCH 08

CONTRA 4

Released: 23 March

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

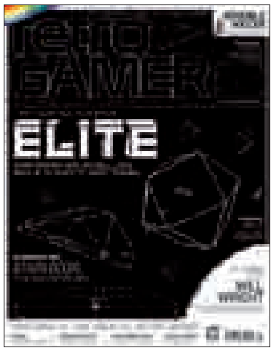
Format: DS

Other magazines don't get it: 'It's too hard.' 'It doesn't add anything to the series.' 'The action's split over two screens.' Whinge, bleat, moan. Okay, when we learned that the developer behind such licensed tosh as *The Scorpion King: Sword Of Osiris* was entrusted with the franchise our heads fell into angry hands, but *Contra 4* is a sublime run-and-gun blaster that gives the third game a run for its money.

eMag

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



CONTACT US

Snail Mail
Retro Gamer
Imagine Publishing
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH2 6EZ

Email
retrogamer@
imagine-publishing.co.uk

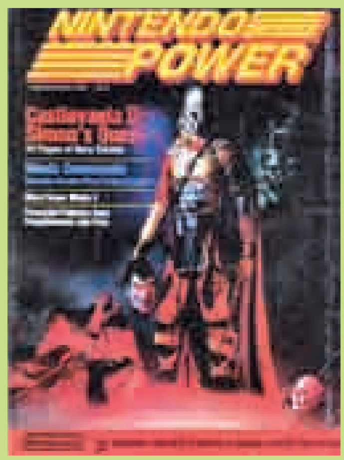
STAR LETTER!

ART ATTACK

Hey guys,
I just thought of a great idea for **Retro Gamer**. Once every couple of issues, it would be cool if you included, say, a **Retro Gamer** poster. Maybe a classic game or something about the magazine. I loved what *Nintendo Power* used to do with their posters, I have them all around my house, so I thought would be really great if you could do the same kind of thing.
PS: I love those T-shirts and binders you have there.

Chris Tormay

Hi Chris, we were actually thinking of running a retro poster in the magazine a few months back. Finding good-quality retro game artwork, however, can be a real headache. Knowing us, it'll be something we will mull over again in an editorial meeting, then remember that it's a no-goer and forget it until next time. But don't be disheartened, if it makes you feel any better we were mightily impressed to hear that you'd plastered those Nintendo Power *posters around your house – though that makes your house a prime target for retro-poster thieves, so be sure to invest in a high-spec security system and wear the* **Retro Gamer** *T-shirt you've just won inside out before you leave the house.*



This is what Chris used to wallpaper his kitchen.

NICE CUBE

Hello **Retro Gamer**,
I just thought I'd write in to thank your magazine for opening my eyes beyond just retro gaming classics for NES and SNES. (I still think NES is legendary.) I am probably one of a few gamers in my age group (19) that loves retro games and consoles and refuses to 'upgrade' and buy any of the latest next-gen videogaming hardware.

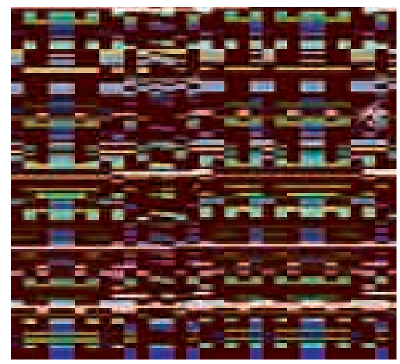
The youngest console I have in my collection is a GameCube and, although perhaps not retro yet, I don't think it got the full recognition it deserved at the time. Maybe in ten years we'll look back at GameCube as a retro classic of the 21st Century with a bit more affection.

Anyway, I just wanted to say I am currently thinking of expanding my modest collection of consoles to include an Atari 2600 – and all because of your fine magazine. **Retro Gamer** has really expanded my horizons, and I look forward to buying your magazine every month. Keep up the good work, guys, and could you maybe do an article on Atari 2600, if you have not already done so?

Daniel Billinghurst

Daniel, it's almost like we read your 19-year-old mind. As your letter arrived, we were putting the finishing touches to the SeaQuest *review in our Top 25 Atari 2600 games, before – being the easily distracted fools we are – accidentally leaving out a very important chunk of text. If you're an 8-bit fan we recommend getting an Atari 2600 as it has tons of brilliant games.*

Regarding the lack of appreciation for GameCube among gamers, despite having so many brilliant games – of which Resident Evil 4 *is the zenith – we believe it's probably down to a lack of quality first-party titles, and wasted IP opportunities. Nintendo did not take advantage of the console's potential, churning out the likes of* Mario Kart: Double Dash!!, Luigi's Mansion, Mario Sunshine, *and* StarFox Adventures. *None of these games were really a patch on their Nintendo 64 or SNES brethren.*



» As you can see, *Yars' Revenge* on the 2600 looks brilliant.



EVERY MONTH, ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

DYNAMIC DRIVING

I just got a 64DD with two *Mario Artist* disks, *Doshin The Giant*, *SimCity 64*, Capture cartridge, Modem cartridge and an N64 case. I just had to tell someone.

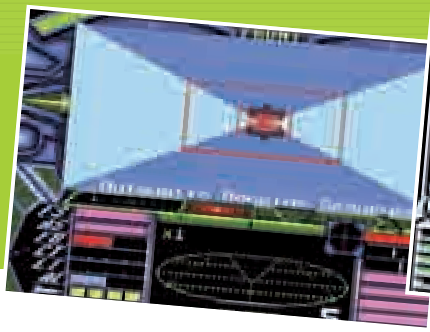
Thanks
Dale, Australia

Congratulations, Dale, we're really pleased to hear about your recent breast implants. Oh yeah, and well done on buying some Nintendo games as well.

FOR SHAME

Dear friends,
This is the first time I have written to you. The reason for this letter is that I want to congratulate you on your decision to include features like Retro Shamer. Since I started reading your magazine, I felt something was missing, but I couldn't figure out what. Enlightenment came in Load 43 when I first read Retro Shamer, then the circle was complete. I believe a bad game is as important as a good game because playing a bad game teaches us what a good game should be. Please don't stop featuring Retro Shamer, as it has become a necessity for me.

Alexandros Karatasou, Athens, Greece





EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER ASKS A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTS THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE MOMENT IN ELITE?

FROM THE FORUM

ID: yakmag
Entering Witchspace and trying (and failing) to shoot the Thargoids.

ID: sirclive1
Skiving off school in 1985 to play it.

ID: RocketRanger
The manual… "Welcome aboard this Cobra Mk III trading and combat craft…"

ID: Pantal00ns
Selling my disk version which allowed me to buy a SNES.

ID: Revgiblet
Two words. Energy. Bomb.

ID: Shin_Gouki
When I first learned about it in **RG**. Still haven't played it.

ID: Yethboth
Experiencing the jaw-dropping graphics, which were never seen before on a 8-bit computer.

ID: Chinnyhill10
Crashing into a space station about 30 seconds in because I forgot how to dock. Doh.

ID: MC1
I thought 'Elite' was a type of Durex.

ID: bonerlaw
The fact that it led to *Frontier.*

ID: FatTrucker
It was the whole experience and the fact that everything was so consistent. When you look at other games of the era nothing came close in terms of player freedom and an environment that reacted to you and your actions.

ID: uglifruit
Regardless of how easy others found the docking, I too was really struggling until I bought a docking computer. Then *Elite* ate my life.

ID: reech
Being the only person at school to have an almost-perfect docking record.

We're very pleased to hear that you're enjoying our Retro Shamer feature, Alexandros. We have a few more quirky-themed, lighter features to try out this year. Stuart is one of those morons who enjoys playing hokum games, he says they give him more pleasure than 70% ones. Anyway, we're pleased that the circle of magazine balance has been completed, and please look out for such gaming turds as Bad Street Brawler *and* Peter Shilton's Handball Maradona *appearing in forthcoming issues of your favourite magazine.*



» The crappy cut-scenes are easily the best things about *Bad Street Brawler.*

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR IS CRAIG SUTHERLAND, A 29-YEAR-OLD ADMINISTRATOR WITH A PENCHANT FOR BEAT-'EM-UPS AND CAPCOM RELEASES



» Craig Sutherland knows a thing or two about beat-'em-ups. His game of choice is *Street Fighter II Turbo*.



When did you first get into gaming?
When I was around seven or eight, which would have been 1985 or 1986. My first 'gaming machine' was one of those orange Seventies consoles with the two-dial controllers, which I inherited from an older cousin. It had built-in tennis (*Pong*), football (*Pong* with two bats at each side), and squash (*Pong* against a wall). It also came with a very primitive lightgun, which you had to shoot at the square on the screen. At the time, I thought it was amazing. From there my fascination with games grew and I got a 2600, followed by a C64, then onto consoles.

And when did you decide that you wanted to start collecting?
I didn't make a decision to collect, it just happened. This is actually my second collection as I 'gave up' once before and sold off most of my first compilation. The first collection started when I was at university. I had a PSone and used to go to car-boot sales to see if I could spot a bargain. Sega Saturn could be bought for next to nothing, at that point, so I decided to get one. I followed this up with an N64, Dreamcast, NES, Master System, and Mega Drive. I started looking for games for those formats and soon had an impressive collection. After a while I stopped playing the games and got rid of most of my older machines and games. The trouble was, as soon as I sold them I regretted it and immediately wanted them back. And so the cycle of collecting began again.

You have a fair few beat-'em-ups, what's the appeal there?
I've enjoyed beat-'em-ups since playing older games in the arcades, like *Final Fight*, *Double Dragon*, and *Golden Axe*. My fascination moved to one-on-one fighters, with *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, *Yie Ar Kung Fu*, and *IK+*, then the goalposts moved when *Street Fighter II* arrived.

Why do you like Street Fighter so much?
I enjoy *Street Fighter II* and all of the related games so much because, for me, it is the pinnacle of the genre. No fighting game has ever come close to capturing that same public interest and getting the whole 'easy to learn, difficult to master' aspect correct. The characters also play a big part in the appeal for me. All 12 fighters in the first game are brilliantly designed and feel different, even though three of them all have a variation of the same move. There is very little storyline in the game, but the sheer brilliance of the design shines through and makes you want to know what happens to them.

That's a hell of a lot of Street Fighter games. Are you missing any?
I will never have a complete collection of Street Fighter games, and I never aim to. As much as I often think about re-buying a Saturn, or getting a PC-Engine, I am generally happy with the formats I am collecting for. More and more compilations and re-releases on downloadable services are giving gamers the opportunities to play arcade-perfect versions of all the Street Fighter titles. The only thing that I hope for in the future would be for spot-on versions of some of the earlier games in the 'Vs' series, but since the Marvel rights are no longer in Capcom's hands I'm not really holding my breath.

What's your favourite Street Fighter game and why is it special?
My answer to this question changes from time to time, but for the last year and a bit I would have to say *Street Fighter II Turbo*. I know *Super* had more characters, but for me *Turbo* has the best balance of all the games, as every character has an equal chance in the right hands. *Super* ruined that with T-Hawk, who is an awful character.

You also appear to have a bit of a soft spot for Mortal Kombat.
Mortal Kombat is a guilty pleasure for me. It's not technical and it doesn't hold a candle to *Street Fighter II*, but like a low-budget slasher film, it still holds great appeal. It's cheesy and it wallows in it. The whole controversy about the death moves just goes to show what grade-A idiots the general media can be when it comes to videogames.



» So many *Street Fighter* games, so little time… This is a man who certainly likes his beat-'em-ups.



» Would you pay £30 for an unboxed *Final Fight 3*? You probably would if the alternative was £80 for a boxed copy.



» Craig also has an unhealthy fondness for the *Mortal Kombat* games. Fortunately, he's stayed well away from the dire *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*.

We notice you have quite a few Capcom games. Is there any particular reason for this?
Capcom is one of the all-time greatest videogame companies, along with Nintendo and Sega. Some of my favourite games have the Capcom logo attached, including *Area 88*, *Street Fighter II*, and *Final Fight*. And today you have the *Resident Evil* games, *Dead Rising*, and last year's *God Hand*.

Tell us a little about your AES collection. Was it an expensive aspect of your hobby?
I always wanted an AES since I first saw it in the Nineties. I remember seeing one in Solid Gold Games, a videogame shop in Aberdeen. At the time, it specialised in import games and always had the most desirable titles that you'd only ever seen in the form of screenshots in magazines. When I saw the Neo Geo, it was running *Mutation Nation*. Back then, it was the greatest thing I had ever seen and I just had to get one. This didn't happen, however, until a couple of years ago when I was lucky enough to get one for Christmas from my girlfriend. I have not generally found AES very expensive to collect for, and I'm always on the lookout for a bargain. I always set myself a limit when buying games and refuse to exceed it. I live in the hope that eventually I will find all the games I want for AES at low prices.

And what about the rarest game in your collection? How expensive was that?
I'm really not to sure what I'd class as my 'rarest' game. In terms of the game that I spent the longest time trying to get hold, that was my unboxed copy of *Final Fight 3* for the US SNES. Every boxed edition that went on eBay seemed to go for £80 or above, and I didn't fancy shelling out that amount. One day I bit the bullet and spent around £30 on an unboxed copy. That's certainly the most I have ever paid for an unboxed game, by a long way, and it's one of my more prized games, if perhaps not in terms of value.

If someone wanted to start their own beat-'em-up collection, which ten games would you recommend?
That's a difficult question, but today I'd say, in no particular order, *Street Fighter II Turbo, Capcom Vs SNK, Final Fight, Streets Of Rage II, Soul Calibur, World Heroes 2, Rival Schools 2: Project Justice, Street Fighter Alpha 3, Final Fight 3, Mortal Kombat II.* Ask me tomorrow and that answer may change.

Do you collect to play or are you a hoarder?
A bit of both really. I'm not a fussy collector in that I will buy a game unboxed so that I can play it. However, if I manage to find one in better condition later then I will buy that and sell on my unboxed one. I have games that I wish I had more time to play, and with my

"MORTAL KOMBAT IS A GUILTY PLEASURE. IT DOESN'T HOLD A CANDLE TO STREET FIGHTER II, BUT LIKE A LOW-BUDGET SLASHER FILM, IT STILL HAS APPEAL"

collection sitting at over 800 games (this is a rough estimate), I know full well that I can never play them all to completion.

How much would you say your collection is worth?
I really don't know. Certainly a good few thousand pounds.

Is there anything that you're still looking for?
I would love to get some more Neo Geo games, like some of the more recent *King Of Fighters* titles, *World Heroes Perfect*, *Art Of Fighting 3*, and *Sengoku 3*, but I think I need to win the lottery before I can afford some of those. I'm also keen to get a US version of *Super Punch Out!!* for the SNES, which, for some strange reason, I never seem to get round to buying.

What does your significant other think of your collecting?
My girlfriend doesn't see the appeal in it at all, but she tolerates it to the point that she has let me take over a room in the house for games. She often wishes I'd collect something that doesn't take up so much room.



» As well as *Street Fighter*, Craig also has a particular fondness for AES fighters.

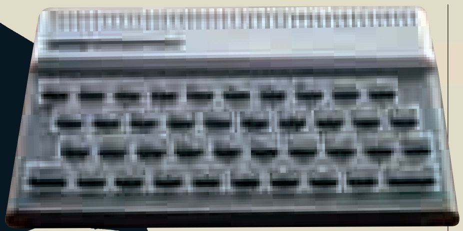
If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then please contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1984



Timex calls time on Sinclair, Marshall Cavendish receives no Input from Imagine, Jet Pac is top banana and Track & Field arrives to give you the gaming equivalent of white finger. Richard Burton takes off at 45 degrees…



Timex, manufacturer of the Sinclair-designed clones of the ZX81 and Spectrum, withdrew from the American computer market. Citing an ever-increasing instability in the marketplace, causing price wars and low profit margins, Timex decided it was time to retreat.

With other computer manufacturers floundering in a sea of uncertainty, and following similar announcements from Texas Instruments and Mattel, it was probably the right move. No comfort to UK software houses who were trying to break into the US with their newly formed American subsidiaries.

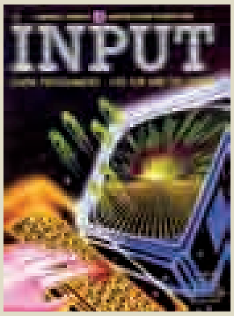
Quicksilva was one company that had invested in the US market and had produced an impressive range of titles for the Timex 2068. Thankfully, it was also producing C64 software, which lessened the impact of the lost Timex revenue.

Imagine Software, still thinking big and spending bigger, got a shock when a publishing deal worth £500,000 fell through. Marshall Cavendish had produced a part-work magazine for computer owners, called *Input*. It wanted Imagine to produce six new games over five different formats to use in its *Input* publication.

Marshall Cavendish rejected the games Imagine produced with the software house stating that there was, "A difference of opinion in the interpretation of our agreement." The contract was mutually terminated.



» Timex pulls the plug on Sinclair's US adventure leaving in its wake some rather bemused software houses with stockpiles of games to shift…



» The weekly part-work magazine lasted 52 issues. Imagine, which owed Marshall Cavendish £500,000, would be lucky to last another 52 days…

Imagine had to refund the half million it had been paid for the contract in 12 monthly instalments beginning in April. It was also left with a handful of games in varying degrees of completion. From this under-developed pile of code just one game was published under Imagine's banner: *Pedro* for Spectrum, C64, BBC, Electron and Dragon.

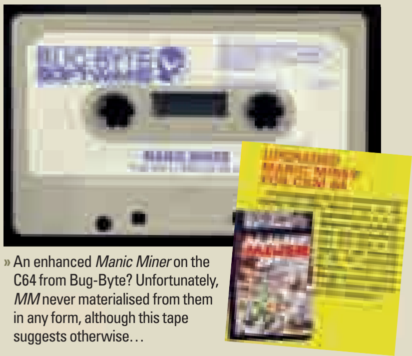
Marshall Cavendish, although it didn't know it at the time, wouldn't see its money again. April was to be the first repayment month, but the first petition for non-payment of debts was presented to the High Court. By July Imagine was no more.

Atari 2600 developer Imagic announced that it would no longer be selling games under its own name, preferring to concentrate its efforts on design and development for other software houses. This news was probably hastened when Rob Fulop, its lead programmer and creator of infamous *Phoenix* clone *Demon Attack* (which niggled Atari), reported he would be leaving the company.

Melbourne House revealed details of its latest 'strategy adventure', the gangster-inspired world of *Mugsy*. Spectrum and C64 versions were expected by the end of the month, priced at £6.95.



» [Spectrum] *Pedro*: Not good enough for Marshall Cavendish's *Input* magazine, but good enough for general release at £5.50.

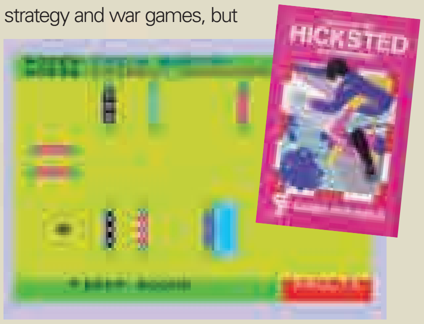


» An enhanced *Manic Miner* on the C64 from Bug-Byte? Unfortunately, *MM* never materialised from them in any form, although this tape suggests otherwise…

With the acrimonious split of Matthew Smith from Bug-Byte to Software Projects fresh in the memory, Bug-Byte appears in a constant state of annoyance surrounding his and *Manic Miner*'s departure to its newly formed rivals. With this, Bug-Byte decided to cash in on the notoriety of the game with an enhanced version of *Manic Miner* for C64 which it fiendishly called *Mattie Goes Mining*. It was supposed to be released toward the end of March and feature prominently in the Bug-Byte Bulletin newsletter. Whether it was intended as a fictional parting shot at its former freelancer or a serious attempt to make some money no one seems to know.

Postern announced three new games for immediate release, *Dinky Digger* for Spectrum, *Pengwyn* for BBC/Electron, and the awful *Xanagrams* for Spectrum, BBC and C64. Future Amstrad owners would also get to savour the drivel that was *Xanagrams*…

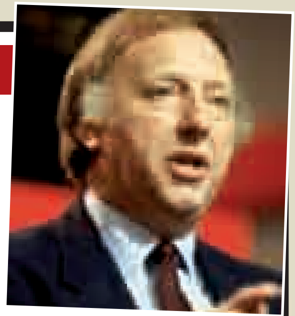
And who said games weren't for girls? Certainly not CCS, which ordinarily released strategy and war games, but



» [Spectrum] *Hicksted*: It's pink, it has a horsey theme – it's from the Games For Girls range by CCS.

THIS MONTH IN... CHARTS

1984



» In the red corner, weighing in at 250lbs, the manic miner with the Shredded Wheat comb-over, Arthur Scargill.

12 March 1984 saw the first day of the infamous Miner's Strike, which lasted almost a year. At its height, more than half of the 187,000 coal miners opted for industrial action. It all started when the chairman of the Coal Board, Ian MacGregor, announced plans to shut down 20 impractical pits, which would result in the loss of 20,000 jobs. After a slow start, striking numbers quickly increased when the president of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill, became involved. He refused to hold a ballot for strike action preferring instead to call on the miners to simply walk out.



» And in the blue corner, made from iron and giving *Spitting Image* years of material, the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher

This resulted in a head-to-head battle with the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who refused to back down and put into place a plan of action. Coal was stockpiled and imported so that there would be no threat of power loss to the country, as in previous miners' strikes.

The strike action finally ended on the 5 March 1985 with no deals made over pit closures. The miners had also failed to disrupt the power supplies. After a very close vote, 98 for a return to work with 91 against, they reluctantly returned back to the collieries. Miner Willy, Bounty Bob and Monty Mole were happy…



» [BBC] *Alien Break-In*: A slick, fast-paced *Galaxians* meets *Space Invaders* game from Romik. Nice.

announced the new Games For Girls range. The first offering was *Hicksted/Mathsted*, a strange mix of showjumping and maths. It came wrapped in a bright pink inlay, which probably smelt of roses.

Romik Software had been busy converting several of its BBC games to Electron. *Alien Break-In, Atom Smasher* and *Birds Of Prey* were among the converted titles with *Alien Break-In* receiving particularly good reviews.

Konami had a new arcade game for you to pummel to death, with the release of the dislocated-thumb-inducing *Track & Field*. It proved a massive hit although prolonged playing would break you, such was the ferocity of the button pounding required.



» [Arcade] *Track & Field*: Play this for an hour a day and never play the piano again.

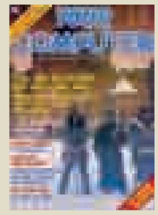
Computer & Video Games magazine finally announced its Golden Joystick award winners for 1983 at a special dinner attended by the leading software houses. The coveted awards were presented by the almost semi-legendary self-styled Hairy Cornflake, Radio One DJ Dave Lee Travis. Ultimate got a double whammy when it picked up Software House Of The Year and Game Of The Year for *Jet Pac*. Best Arcade Style Game went to *Manic Miner* and Best Strategy Game was *The Hobbit* by Melbourne House. Finally, Best Original Game, rather oddly, went to *Ah Diddums* by Imagine, which somehow saw off the challenge of *Ant Attack* and *Pssst!*

Personal Computer Games reviewed 90 new games this month, so there was no shortage of Hits. *Chuckie Egg* (A&F Software, BBC), *Twin Kingdom Valley* (Bug-Byte, C64), *Super Pipeline* (Taskset, C64), *3D Deathchase* (Micromega, Spectrum), *Fighter Pilot* (Digital Integration, Spectrum), *Forty Niner* (Software Farm, ZX81), *Tennis* (Atari, Atari 400/800) and *Pole Position* (Atari, Atari 400/800). However, Best In Show and Game Of The Month was *Scuba Dive* (Durell, Spectrum).

C&VG reviewed some interesting console games including *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, Colecovision), *Beam Rider* (Activision, Intellivision), *Fathom* (Imagic, Atari 2600), *Dig Dug* (Atari, Atari 2600) and *Spectron* (SpectraVideo, Colecovision).

Your Computer featured *Oblivion* (Bug-Byte, BBC), *Scuba Dive* (Durell, Spectrum), *Air Strike II* (English Software, Atari 400/800) and Mad Martha II (Mikro-Gen, Spectrum).

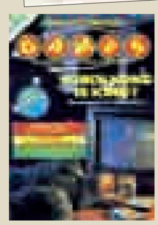
YOUR COMPUTER



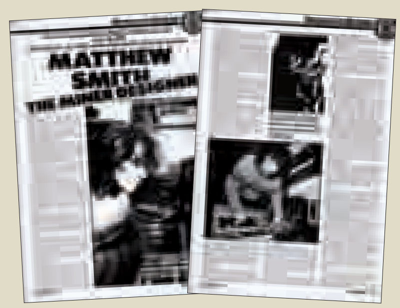
Your Computer featured an interesting look at the MSX and how it was finally making in-roads into the UK. Although the feared Japanese invasion of the machines made by Sony, Hitachi, Canon et al never really took hold, they certainly opened the eyes of gamers to some interesting cartridge-based gaming action.



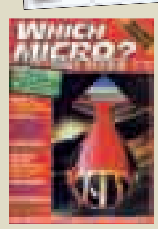
PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES



PCG interviewed the current programming flavour of the month, Matthew Smith, about *Manic Miner, Jet Set Willy* and his strange lack of socks during the winter. Smith mentioned that his first commercial game, *Delta Tau One* on the TRS-80 sold 13 copies and made him £50.



WHICH MICRO & SOFTWARE REVIEW



Atari 2600 owners wishing to become programmers tucked into a review of the SpectraVideo CompuMate, which allowed a keyboard to be plugged into the console via the cartridge slot. The reviewer didn't see a future for it and suggested buying a ZX81 or Aquarius instead.



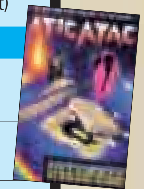
MARCH 1984

BBC



1. The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
2. Saloon Sally (Psion)
3. Missile Control (Gemini)
4. Mr Men (Mirrorsoft)
5. Snapper (Acornsoft)

SPECTRUM



1. Atic Atac (Ultimate)
2. Lunar Jetman (Ultimate)
3. Ant Attack (Quicksilva)
4. Manic Miner (Software Projects)
5. Chequered Flag (Sinclair/Psion)

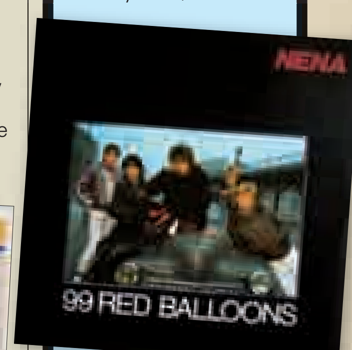
COMMODORE 64



1. The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
2. Arcadia (Imagine)
3. Krazy Kong (Interceptor)
4. Radar Rat Race (Commodore)
5. Purple Turtles (Quicksilva)

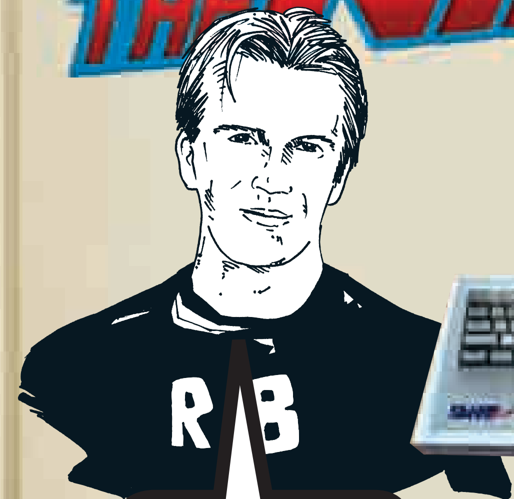
MUSIC SINGLES CHART MAR '84

1. 99 Red Balloons (Nena)
2. Joanna/Tonight (Kool & The Gang)
3. Street Dance (Break Machine)
4. Wouldn't It Be Good (Nik Kershaw)
5. Relax (Frankie Goes To Hollywood)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1990



June 1990 – MGT goes bust, C64 consoles itself while Nintendo gets protective over a dodgy genie, Domark does 007, football is everywhere and The Untouchables are… well, untouchable. Richard Burton dons his boots and goes in two-footed…



» It's a shame the SAM didn't appear a year or two earlier as it was a terrific machine.

The creator of the SAM Coupé, Miles Gordon Technology, went into receivership this month after mounting debts forced its hand. As one director put it, "MGT will be dead soon, but the SAM will not. The company failed, not the product." Strangely, on the very same day, *Defenders Of The Earth* the first arcade game for the machine was launched. Furthermore, MGT had only just recently won a nationwide distribution deal to sell its machine through John Menzies, adding yet more irony to proceedings.

Commodore signalled what could be the end of the long and illustrious C64 with the news it would be releasing a console version of C64 minus the keyboard and running only cartridge games. Commodore 64 Games System was seen as a viable alternative to consoles already in circulation. Commodore released the machine in December 1990 and it bombed. It was a failure commercially and the promised software failed to materialise.

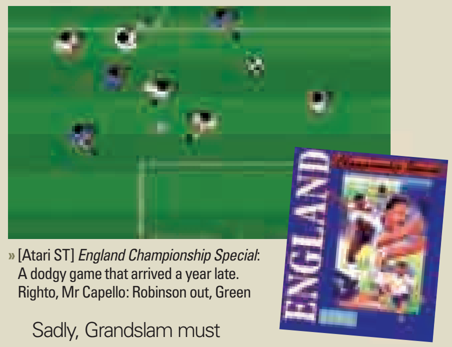
Galoob developed a game-enhancing peripheral for Codemasters for use on the NES. The Game Genie cheat cartridge allowed gamers to modify game data and find unused content. Nintendo, opposed to this supposed invasion of its gaming data, sued Galoob claiming it created derivative works in violation of copyright law. However, the courts found in favour of Galoob and various versions of the Game Genie went into production for other consoles shortly after. Sega, liking the product, officially endorsed the new Mega Drive version.



» [Atari ST] *Elvira*: …and the soup of the day is some bloke's head in a cauldron of sick. Croutons anyone?

When not endorsing, Sega was developing games based on old favourites. *Paperboy* was getting the console treatment with the newspaper-throwing game reportedly just a few weeks from completion for the Master System. The second title was *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, and again, its release was imminent across a plethora of computer and console formats.

In the month that saw the start of the World Cup, you'd expect football games galore to be oozing from every pore of every software house that ever made a game. You would, of course, be completely correct. Grandslam, which had been collecting football licences like Panini football stickers, announced it had added the England team to its portfolio. *England – The Computer Game* would, according to Grandslam, be hitting the shelves of your local computer shop just as they kick off in Italy.



» [Atari ST] *England Championship Special*: A dodgy game that arrived a year late. Righto, Mr Capello: Robinson out, Green

Sadly, Grandslam must have come up against the programming equivalent of Croatia during development, as the game finally made its belated debut in late summer 1991 under the title *England Championship Special*. Even with the time to iron out any wrinkles, the game still turned out to be as disappointing as Chris Waddle hitting the floodlights with a penalty kick.

US Gold, never one to let quality get in the way of making a few quid, also released its own game, *Italy 1990*. Following in the footsteps of the atrocious *World Cup Carnival*, this was also a wasted opportunity and was more Accrington Stanley than Arsenal. US Gold also announced that it intended to follow up the success of *California Games* with a sequel, aptly named *California Games II*. The new game would feature such interesting new events as jet skiing, body boarding and hand gliding. Would the result leave you 'stoked to the max' or 'totally worked'? Let's just say (in English), it wasn't good.

Thalamus, creator of such C64 games as *Armalyte* and *Creatures*, divulged some interesting information on new titles under development including *The Search For Sharla*,



» Plans to bring *Leisure Suit Larry* and his bulging trousers to the big screen failed at the first hurdle, thankfully…



» [Master System] *Paperboy*: Throw papers, hit stuff, fall off your bike and try to avoid things. It's as simple but effective as gaming gets.



» [Amiga] *Antheads*: Not a full game but an expansion disk for *It Came From The Desert*. Most excellent.

1990

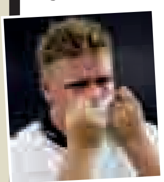
JUNE NEWS



» The England team line up for the World Cup semi-final against Germany. Shilton is dropped

The fourteenth FIFA World Cup kicked off on 8 June with Cameroon defeating Argentina 1-0 in the opening game. England had their usual rollercoaster ride through the tournament. Highlights included David Platt's swivel volley against Belgium in the final minutes of extra time against Belgium, and Gary Linker's two successful penalties to come from behind in the quarter-final against Cameroon.

And the lowlights? Peter Shilton diving backward in slow motion, like a sack of spuds, when a German free-kick in the semi-final deflected off Paul Parker, looped high in the air and over Shilton into the net. The third-place play off against Italy also produced a marvellous display of inept English defending resulting in a 2-1 loss.



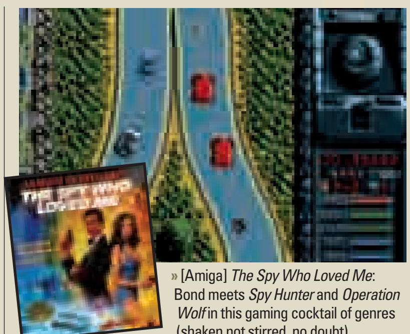
» He's either wiping the residue of several meat and potato pies away from his face or he's crying again…

Other memorable moments included Pedro Monson of Argentina being the first player to be sent off in a final, and Paul Gascoigne blubbing is eyes out after getting booked in the semi-final against Germany. There was also The Three Tenors and the unofficial anthem for the tournament, *Nessun Dorma* performed by Luciano Pavarotti. It gained him massive popularity among the supporters who previously had no idea who he was.

The final itself, played on 8 July, was a dismal affair with Germany beating Argentina with a debated penalty scored by Andreas Brehme ten minutes from time.



» [Master System] *California Games II*: Featuring all-new sports including hand gliding, dominoes, custard gargling and frog plaiting.



» [Amiga] *The Spy Who Loved Me*: Bond meets *Spy Hunter* and *Operation Wolf* in this gaming cocktail of genres (shaken not stirred, no doubt).

Bamboo: Hawkeye II and *The Q8 Team Ford Rally Simulation*. With *Team Ford Rally* featuring in many magazines of the time and early previews boding well, it was surprising to find that none of the games ever reached the shops.

In a reversal of the game-of-the-movie licensing trend, Sierra Online revealed it was in negotiations with film companies to produce a movie based on its top-selling game character, Leisure Suit Larry. Again, there was no end product as talks failed at the preliminary stage.

The name's Bond, Domark-licensed computer game Bond. Domark does it again with the news it is working on another Bond game, this time based on *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Domark focused on the Lotus Esprit underwater car and produced a game that could have been the illegitimate offspring of *Spy Hunter* and *Operation Wolf*. Not blindingly original but quite fun nevertheless. Amiga, ST and the usual 8-bit formats would see a version of the game within three months.



» [DOS] *LHX Attack Chopper*: Terrific helicopter simulation containing varied missions but with more of an arcade feel than its competitors. Truly great stuff.

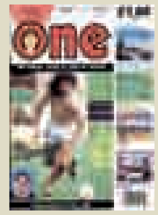
EMAP played host to the 1990 Golden Joystick Awards, the annual soiree for software houses. Category winners included 8-Bit Game Of The Year going to *The Untouchables* by Ocean, and the 16-bit equivalent awarded to *Kick Off* by Anco. The coveted Software House Of The Year for 1990 was… Ocean…

This month multiformat magazine *Zero* gave its Zero Hero top rating to *Jack Nicklaus' Greatest 18 Holes* (Accolade, Amiga), *Greg Norman's Ultimate Gold* (Gremlin, Amiga), *Elvira: Mistress Of The Dark* (Horrorsoft, Atari ST), *Turrican* (Rainbow Art, Amiga), *Wipe Out* (Gonzo Games, Amiga) and *Sim City: Terrain Editor* (Infogrames, Amiga). Meanwhile, in its console section the Console Classic award was given to *The New Zealand Story* (Taito, PC-Engine and Mega Drive).

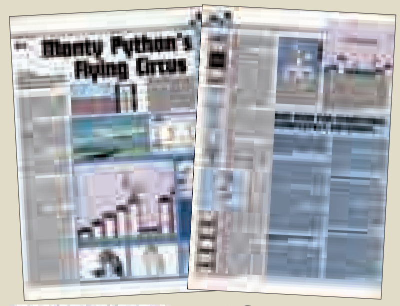
The Games Machine gave its TGM Star Player awards to *Ski Or Die* (EA, PC), *LHX Attack Chopper* (EA, PC), *Railroad Tycoon* (Microprose, PC), *Ninja Spirit* (Activision, C64), *Antheads* (Cinemaware/Mirrorsoft, Amiga), *Klax* (Tengen/Domark, Spectrum), *Budokan* (EA, Amiga) and Infestation (Psygnosis, Amiga).

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

THE ONE



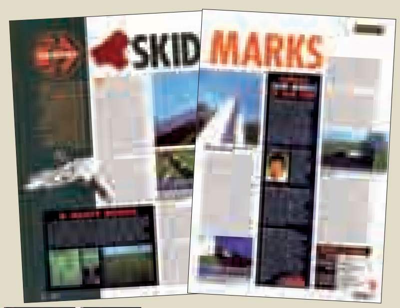
The One featured an interview with Core Design, who was developing the *Monty Python's Flying Circus* game. They pointed out the obstacles they faced converting a cult comedy series into a playable computer game while keeping the bizarre sense of humour intact. In the finished product, the player was cast as Gumby. Ooh, my brain hurts…



ZERO



While featuring the sturdily built Elvira on the cover of *Zero*, inside it previewed Mindscape's new racing game *Skid Marks* for the Amiga. At least it gave the interviewer opportunity to mention bottom dirt, bum spuds, chocolate starfish or any other turdy references.



THE GAMES MACHINE



Richard Eddy visited Thalamus Software to find out how its new game, *Q8 Ford Team Rally Simulation* was progressing. Apart from being the firm's first licensed product it was also going to be its first multiformat game with versions for Spectrum/SAM, Amstrad, C64, Atari ST, Amiga and PC. It was never released.



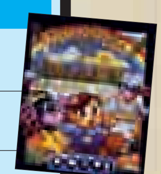
JUNE 1990

AMIGA



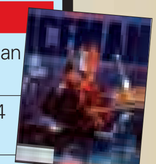
1 Italia 1990 (Codemasters)
2 Manchester United (Krisalis)
3 Rainbow Islands (Ocean)
4 X-Out (Rainbow Arts)
5 TV Basketball (Mirrorsoft)

ATARI ST



1 Rainbow Islands (Ocean)
2 Midwinter (Rainbird)
3 Italia 1990 (Codemasters)
4 Supercars (Gremlin)
5 Player Manager (Anco)

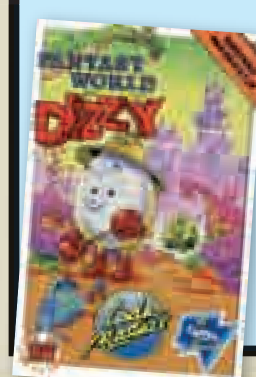
PC



1 Codename Iceman (Sierra On-Line)
2 Flight Simulator 4 (Microsoft)
3 Sim City Terrain Editor (Infogrames)
4 LHX Attack Chopper (Electronics Arts)
5 Populous (Electronics Arts)

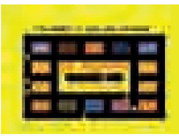
AMSTRAD CPC

1 Fantasy World Dizzy (Codemasters)
2 Paperboy (Encore)
3 Ikari Warriors (Encore)
4 Chase HQ (Ocean)
5 Batman (Ocean)



OH MUMMY!

YOU'LL BE WANTING YOURS AFTER HEARING THE THEME TUNE



- » **PUBLISHER:** AMSOFT
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** MAZE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC 464
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** 50 PENCE



HISTORY

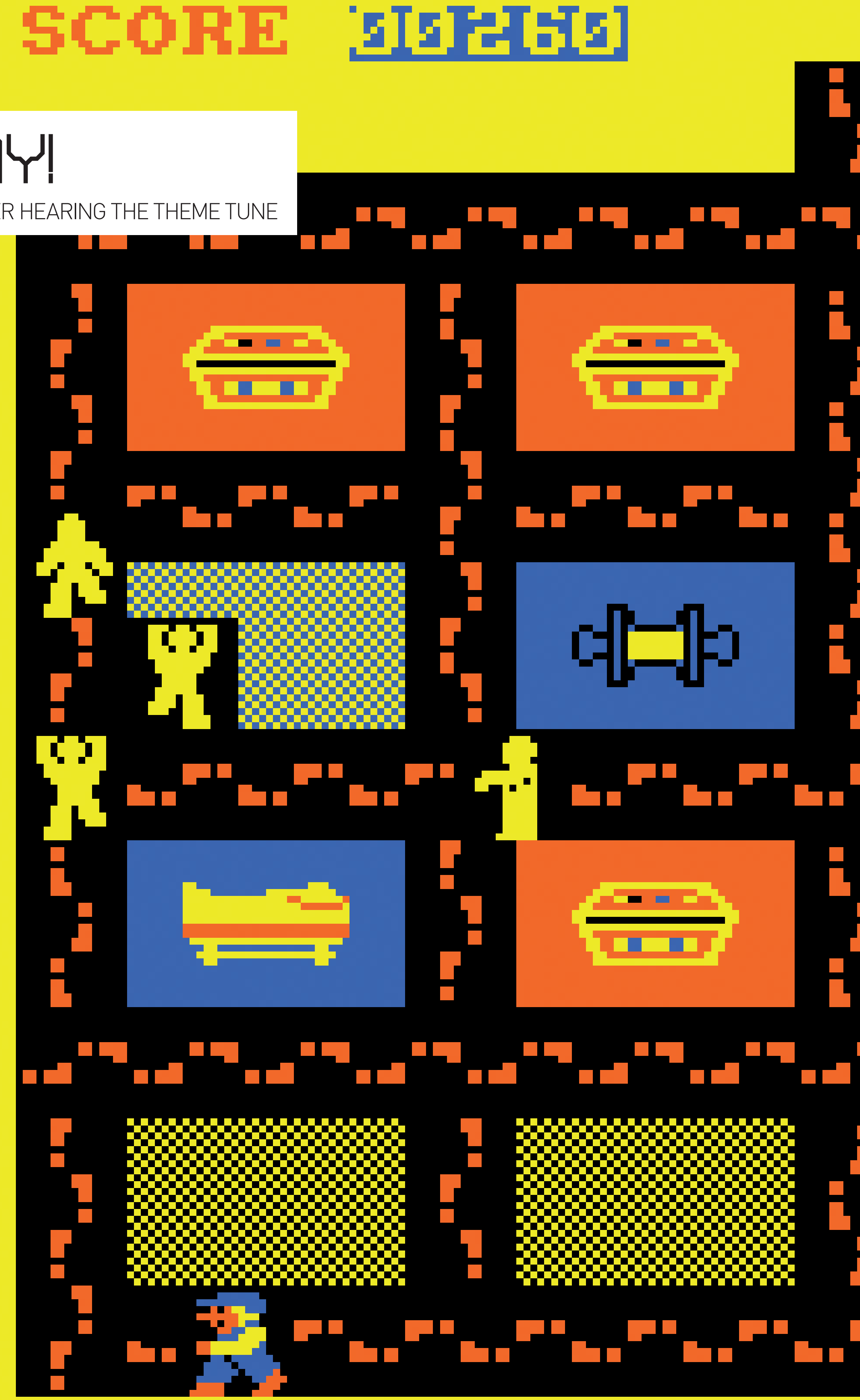
Hooray, it's another classic Retro Revival where we talk about an old 8-bit game – in this case *Oh Mummy!* – and get to comment on how it's little more than a rip-off of a classic arcade game from the past – in this case Konami's *Amidar*.

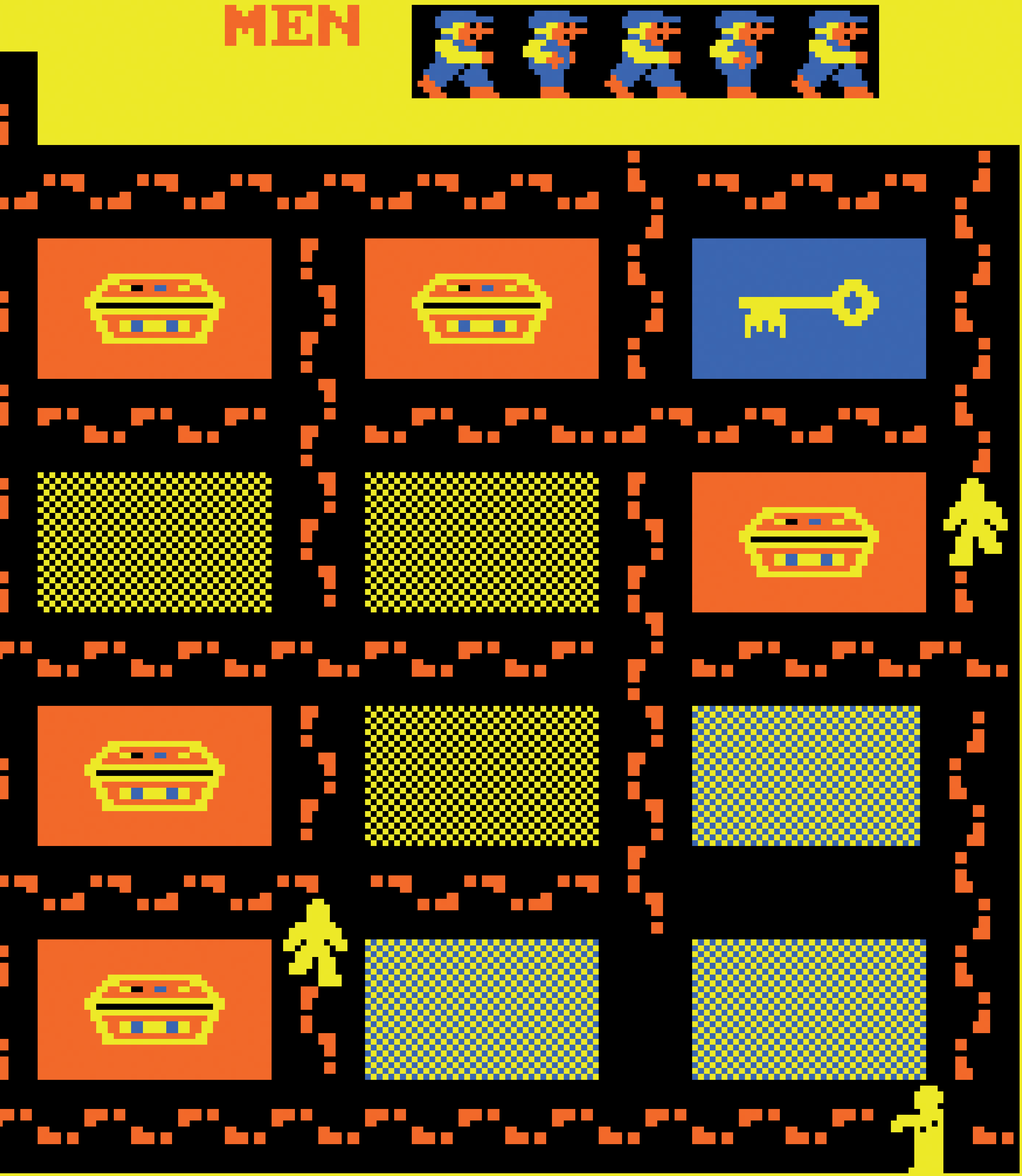
Taking on the role of a portly archaeologist, your task in this surprisingly fun Amsoft release couldn't be simpler, and almost makes us forget about the atrocity that was *Bridge-It*. Almost… All you have to do is run around several dusty pyramids to uncover a key and the location of the Pharaoh's tomb, so enabling you to reach the next stage. As you sprint through the dusty corridors you leave visible footprints; once you've fully run around one of 20 rectangles you'll reveal its actual contents. It's amazingly simplistic and requires you to do nothing more than push left, right, up or down.

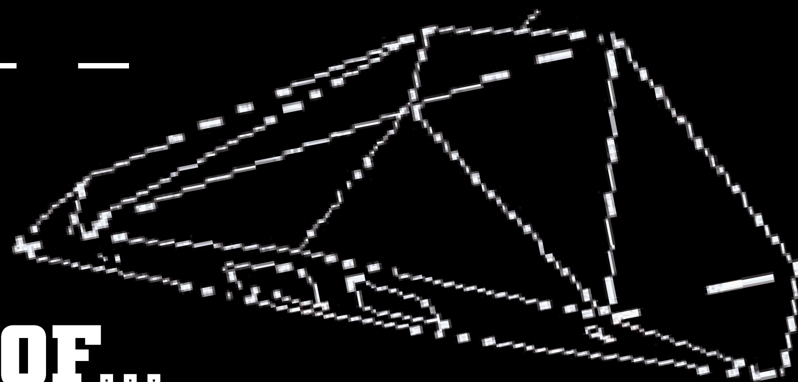
Of course, life is never easy though, as some very persistent mummies plague the ancient tombs that this particular Indiana Jones wannabe is intent on investigating. While relatively slow and unintelligent, numbers are on the undead's side and as you complete new levels – and unwittingly free others from their tombs – you'll soon find yourself being chased by one angry undead horde.

And that's pretty much all there is to it. You run around rectangles, uncover treasure, avoid mummies and move on to the next stage. And yet, despite its straightforward gameplay, Lego-like visuals and annoyingly monotonous theme tune – a ten-second loop of *The Hootchy Kootchy Dance* – we're still horribly addicted to the damn thing.

Running around each stage while avoiding its many mummies is strangely mesmerising, and as levels are completed and more mummies join the chase it just becomes even more engrossing. You could argue that there are certainly far better *Amidar* clones available, and that no one should ever have to endure such a horrendous tune, but there can be no denying that it's fun to play. Just don't buy the horrible Spectrum version by mistake.




MEN



THE HISTORY OF...

ELITE

IT'S ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL FRANCHISES OF ALL TIME; CAUSED A RIFT BETWEEN ITS TWO CREATORS AND BECAME SO POPULAR THAT NEARLY EVERYONE WHO OWNED AN ACORN BBC OWNED A COPY. BUT HOW DID ELITE BECOME SUCH AN ENDURING CLASSIC? DARRAN JONES SPEAKS TO CO-CREATORS DAVID BRABEN AND IAN BELL TO FIND THE ANSWERS



Space is a lot of things. To James T Kirk it was the final frontier, a place where no man had gone before; Ridley Scott saw it as a tomb where no one could hear you scream; while for others it was an annoying and distinctly average Liverpudlian indie band from the mid-Nineties. For David Braben and Ian Bell, two young 19 year olds from Jesus College, Cambridge, space was a place where anything was potentially possible and, in 1984, they shared those possibilities with hundreds of thousands of excited gamers.

Weighing in at a hefty £17 and sporting a dictionary-sized manual, Braben and Bell's space-trading epic was certainly not for the faint-hearted. That 65-page entry to the world of *Elite* was an incredibly dense read, and covered everything from the universe's political profile, to its many alien races. Indeed, such was the intensity of Braben and Bell's vision that it even mentioned rules, regulations and details that had absolutely no bearing on *Elite*'s actual gameplay. When dealing with any alien life forms, for example, the following three rules should *always* be followed: Learn the body language of the alien race, cover up your body scent and beware of Carapace concealed weapons. These rules and many others had absolutely no relevance in the actual world of *Elite* as far as the player was concerned, and yet they helped to paint a universe that was incredibly rich in atmosphere. BioWare's *Mass Effect* was recently praised for its in-game profiles that helped give the player a greater understanding of the worlds he was exploring, and yet a humble 8-bit release managed the same thing – some would argue, to greater effect – 23 years earlier.

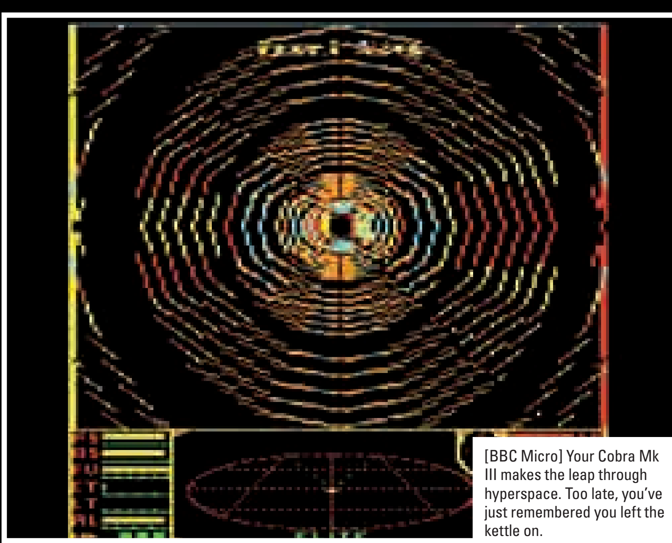
That's the real strength and beauty of *Elite* though. It managed to offer gamers possibilities and options and created a realistic environment that felt unbelievably fresh and exciting back in 1984. Even today though, *Elite* remains an absolute joy to play. Sure the dynamic wire-framed ships that wowed so many gamers when they first saw them are starting to look a little rough around the edges, and the trading that turned us all into wannabe Gordon Gekkos now seems rather basic and antique, but that matters not one jot once you actually take off in your Cobra Mk III and explore *Elite*'s beautifully realised universe. It must be incredibly satisfying for Braben and Bell to know that their creation remains as fun to play as it did in 1984, and it's simply amazing to think that this entire universe could fit into a paltry 32K. That's only 4K less than what we've currently written!

"I first received an Acorn Atom back before I went to University," recalls Braben about the machine that would eventually help shape his future career. Put together by Braben in 1981 – back then computers came in kits – after he received it as a Christmas present, when the Atom was finally constructed and switched on it simply said,

BASIC

>

It was all the prompting Braben needed and he quickly began to create variations of classic arcade games, with his most notable effort being based on *Missile Command* and known as *Nuclear War*. "I loaded from tape this picture I had drawn of the world on my television with a



[BBC Micro] Your Cobra Mk III makes the leap through hyperspace. Too late, you've just remembered you left the kettle on.

ELITE A-Z

A is for Adder – A single-missile-carrying craft that was manufactured by the Outworld Workshop.

B is for David Braben and Ian Bell – The two minds behind the original *Elite*. Braben went on to create *Frontier: Elite II* and *Frontier: First Encounters*.

C is for Cobra Mk III – This is the ship that is first displayed when *Elite* loads up and is also the craft you pilot.

D is for Docking – Braben and Bell had both been awed by *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s docking sequence and wanted something similar in *Elite*.

E is for Energy Bomb – This is a devastating weapon that can only be used once and is available from a planet with a Tech Level of seven or higher.

F is for Firebird – Because Braben and Bell had not sold future conversion rights to Acornsoft, Firebird ended up being the lucky publisher.

G is for Gametek – The company that published *Frontier* and *First Encounters* and was involved in a three-year lawsuit with David Braben.

H is for (Robert) Holdstock – Author of *The Dark Wheel* novella that was included in the original *Elite* boxset.

I is for Illuminatus – Spoof April Fool's joke about a videogame that was very similar to *Elite*.

J is for Jesus College – University of Cambridge where Braben and Bell first met.

K is for Konami – Was to be the original publisher of *Frontier* until it closed down its offices and sold to Gametek.

L is for Lawsuit – David Braben was unhappy with the way *First Encounters* was handled by Gametek and launched a lawsuit. He won it three years later.

M is for Missions – While early versions of *Elite* only contained a few missions, *Frontier* boasted over 70 different ones.

N is for Newtonian Mechanics – Both *Frontier* and *First Encounters* featured realistic physics instead of the more arcadey controls of *Elite*.

O is for Oolite – Excellent homage to *Elite* that started off life as an OpenGL Mac OS X title. It was created by Giles Williams.

P is for Procedural Generation – A way of generating algorithmically on the fly so that precious memory isn't needlessly wasted.

Q is for Questions – Ian Bell has been asked so many questions about *Elite* that he now hosts the most popular ones on his website, www.iancgbell.clara.net.

R is for Reptiles – Many of the spaceships in *Elite* are named after different reptiles. We were going to ask why this was but we forgot to. Doh!

S is for (Chris) Sawyer – Creator of *RollerCoaster Tycoon*. He also coded *Frontier: Elite II* for the PC.

T is for Thorn EMI – The publisher that amazingly turned down *Elite* as it felt it needed a score and extra lives.

U is for Universe – The *Elite* universe contains eight galaxies, each of which contains a further 256 planets.

V is for Viper – Extremely quick spacecraft that's used by the GalCop Police Force.

W is for Wireframe – *Elite* was one of the first home computer titles to use wireframe 3D graphics.

X is for X-Rated words – Braben and Bell had to check the procedurally generated galaxy didn't contain any naughty words. They didn't find any really bad words, but they did find 'arse'.

Y is for Yellow – The colour of *Elite*'s symbol. We're sure there's a better word for the letter Y but we can't think of one.

Z is for Zieman – Creates the deflective shields that are found on the Cobra Mk III.

ROGUES' GALLERY

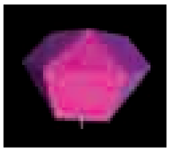
ALTHOUGH YOU CAN ONLY USE THE COBRA MK III, THERE ARE PLENTY OF DIFFERENT SHIPS TO BE FOUND IN THE ORIGINAL ELITE. HERE'S A QUICK GUIDE TO THE ONES THAT YOU'LL BE ENCOUNTERING ON YOUR TRAVELS



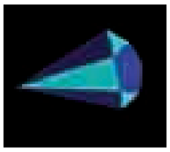
ADDER
DIMENSIONS
45/8/30 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
2 TC (Tonne Canisters)
ARMAMENTS
Ingram 1928 AZ Beam Laser; Geret Starseeker missile
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.24 LM (Light Mach)
INSERVICE DATE
2914 AD (Outworld Workshop)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 4 (Curve Factor)
CREW NUMBER
2
DRIVE MOTORS
AM 18 bi Thrust
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T Ko 28
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



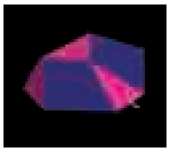
ANACONDA
DIMENSIONS
170/60/75 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
750 TC
ARMAMENTS
Front-Fire Hassoni HiRad Pulse Laser; ColtMaster Starlasers; Geret Starseeker Missiles
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.14 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2856 AD (RimLiner Galactic)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 3
CREW NUMBER
40-72
DRIVE MOTORS
V & K 32.24 Ergmasters, with under-and-over firing tubes
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T(ensmann) Ji57 C-Holding Z22-28
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



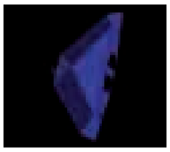
ASP MK II
DIMENSIONS
70/20/65 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
None
ARMAMENTS
Hassoni-Kruger Burst Laser; Geret Starseeker missile
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.40 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2878 AD (Galcop Workshops)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 4
CREW NUMBER
2
DRIVE MOTORS
Voltaire Whiplash HZ Pulsedrive
HULL STRESS FACTOR
TT16
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



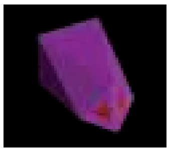
BOA CLASS CRUISER
DIMENSIONS
115/60/65 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
125 TC
ARMAMENTS
Ergon Laser system; Standard JK Pulse laser; IFS Seek & Hunt missiles
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.24 LM
INSERVICE DATE
3017 AD (Gerege Federation Space Works)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 4
CREW NUMBER
15-28
DRIVE MOTORS
4 C40KV Ames Drive motors; Seeklight Thrust Systems
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T (ensmann) Yo20 C-Holding K21-31
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



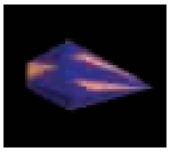
COBRA MK I
DIMENSIONS
55/15/70 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
10 TC
ARMAMENTS
Hassoni Variscan laser system and early Lance & Ferman missile system
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.26 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2855 AD (Paynou, Prossett and Salem)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 3
CREW NUMBER
1
DRIVE MOTORS
Prossett Drive
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T Ji 18
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



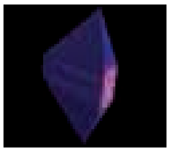
COBRA MK III
DIMENSIONS
65/30/130 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
20 TC
ARMAMENTS
Ingram laser system; Lance & Ferman Seek & Kill missile system
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.30 LM
INSERVICE DATE
3100 AD (Cowell & MgRath Shipyards, Lave)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 8
CREW NUMBER
1 or 2
DRIVE MOTORS
Kruger 'Lightfast' motors
Irrikan ThruSpace
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T Ji 18
C-Holding M18
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



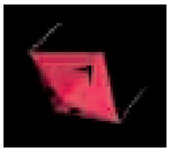
ORBIT SHUTTLES
DIMENSIONS
35/20/20 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
60 TC
ARMAMENTS
None
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.08 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2856 AD (Saud-Kruger Astro Design)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 4
CREW NUMBER
6
DRIVE MOTORS
V & K 20.20 StarMat drive
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T Ko 28
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
No



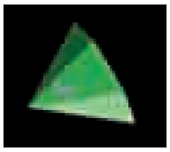
FER-DE-LANCE
DIMENSIONS
85/20/45 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
2 TC
ARMAMENTS
Ergan Laser System; IFS Seek & Hunt missiles
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.30 LM
INSERVICE DATE
3100 AD (Zorgon Petterson)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 5
CREW NUMBER
12
DRIVE MOTORS
Titronix Intersun Ionic for LT
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T Ji 10
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



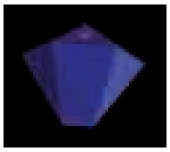
GECKO
DIMENSIONS
12/40/65 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
3 TC
ARMAMENTS
Ingram 1919 A4 laser; LM Homing missile
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.30 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2852 AD (Ace & Faber Hullworks, Lerelace)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF7
CREW NUMBER
1 or 2
DRIVE MOTORS
BreamPulse Light XL
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T to 48-94
C-Holding JZ20
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
N/A



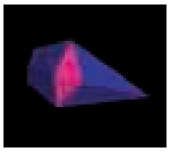
KRAIT
DIMENSIONS
80/20/90 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
10 TC
ARMAMENTS
Ergon laser system
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.30 LM
INSERVICE DATE
3027 AD (deLacy ShipWorks, ININES)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 8
CREW NUMBER
1
DRIVE MOTORS
deLacy Spinlonic ZX 14
HULL STRESS FACTOR
C-Holding A20-B4
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
No



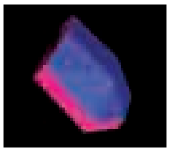
MAMBA
DIMENSIONS
55/12/65 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
10 TC
ARMAMENTS
Ergon laser
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.32 LM
INSERVICE DATE
3110 AD (Reorte Ship Federation)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 9
CREW NUMBER
1 0r 2
DRIVE MOTORS
Seeklight HV Thrust
HULL STRESS FACTOR
TKi 10
C-Holding B100+
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
No



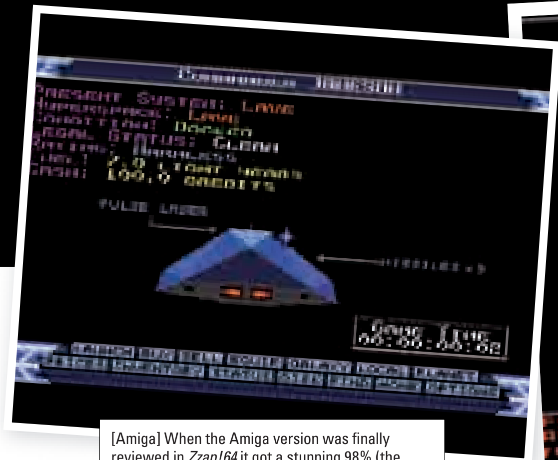
MORAY STAR BOAT
DIMENSIONS
60/25/60 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
7 TC
ARMAMENTS
Geret Starseeker missile system
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.25 LM
INSERVICE DATE
3028 AD
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 4
CREW NUMBER
6
DRIVE MOTORS
Turbulen Quark Re-charger Mode 1287
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T Ko 24
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



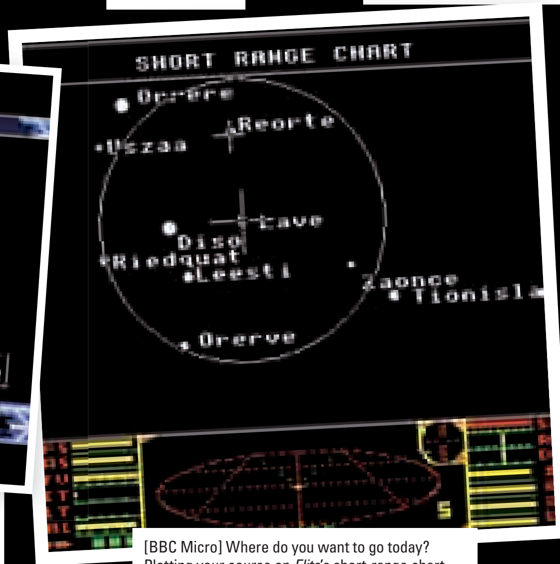
PYTHON
DIMENSIONS
130/40/80 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
100 TC
ARMAMENTS
Volt-Variscan Pulse lasers
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.20 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2700 AD (Whatt and Pritney ShipConstruct)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 3
CREW NUMBER
20-30
DRIVE MOTORS
4 C40K V Ames Drive
Exlon 76NN Model
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T(ensman) YO 20
C-Holding K21-31
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



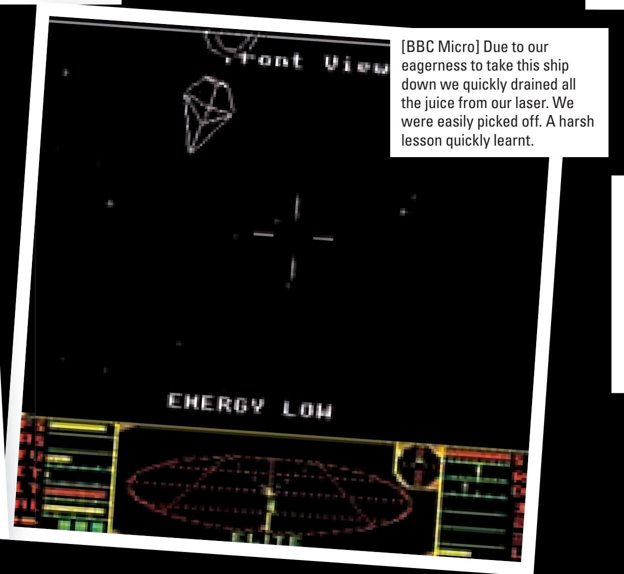
TRANSPORTER
DIMENSIONS
35/10/30 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
N/A
ARMAMENTS
N/A
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
N/A
INSERVICE DATE
Unknown, but probably pre-2500 AD. Known prototype built on SpaceLink Shipyards, Mars orbit (Old Earth)
MANOEUVRABILITY
N/A
CREW NUMBER
N/A
DRIVE MOTORS
N/A
HULL STRESS FACTOR
N/A
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
N/A



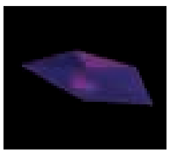
[Amiga] When the Amiga version was finally reviewed in *Zzap!64* it got a stunning 98% (the same score we gave Jeff Minter's *Space Giraffe*). The Amiga version was good, but was it that good?



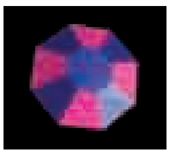
[BBC Micro] Where do you want to go today? Plotting your course on *Elite*'s short-range chart.



[BBC Micro] Due to our eagerness to take this ship down we quickly drained all the juice from our laser. We were easily picked off. A harsh lesson quickly learnt.



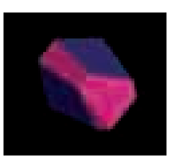
SIDEWINDER SCOUT SHIP
DIMENSIONS
35/15/65 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
None
ARMAMENTS
Dual 22-18 lasers; Seeker missiles
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.37 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2982 AD (Onrira Orbital/ spalder & Starblaze)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 9
CREW NUMBER
1
DRIVE MOTORS
deLacy Spin Ionic MV
HULL STRESS FACTOR
Not available; C-Holding C50
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
No



THARGOID INVASION SHIPS
DIMENSIONS
180/40/180 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
N/A
ARMAMENTS
Widely varying; Mountings available for most systems
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.20 LM
INSERVICE DATE
Uncertain
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 6
CREW NUMBER
150
DRIVE MOTORS
Thargoid invention
HULL STRESS FACTOR
Uncertain
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
Yes



VIPER (POLICE SHIP)
DIMENSIONS
55/80/50 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
Zero
ARMAMENTS
Ingram MegaBlast Pulse laser; Seeker missiles
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.32 LM
INSERVICE DATE
2762 AD (Faulcon Manspace, Reorte)
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 7.4
CREW NUMBER
1 (up to 10)
DRIVE MOTORS
deLacy Super Thrust VC10
HULL STRESS FACTOR
Varies
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
No



WORM CLASS LANDING CRAFT
DIMENSIONS
32/12/35 ft
CARGO CAPACITY
None
ARMAMENTS
Ingram Pulse laser
MAXIMUM VELOCITY
0.23 LM
INSERVICE DATE
3101 AD
MANOEUVRABILITY
CF 6
CREW NUMBER
2
DRIVE MOTORS
Seeklight HV Thrust
HULL STRESS FACTOR
T Ki 10
HYPERSPACE CAPABILITY
No

Chinagraph pencil and followed this up by drawing in all the pixels," he recalls. "The idea of the game was that you played either Russia or America and you had to keep firing missiles across at each other in this big parabolic path in order to destroy the other guy's city. The score was based on the number of deaths on the other side so it wasn't terribly politically correct, but that's how it all started."

While *Nuclear War* never received a retail release, it did enable Braben to better understand the working intricacies of assembly language, which was far faster to use than BASIC and would eventually help to greatly speed up the progress of *Elite*.

Once he had fully grasped assembly language, Braben continued to muck around with various games and programs until he stumbled on something that would change his future forever. "One of the first things I programmed was an expanding star field," says Braben. "I found the 3D effects to be really quite amazing." Braben was so impressed with his creation that he quickly began to formulate a game that would eventually become the unreleased *Fighter*. "I put a spaceship in the environment and it felt okay. You shot one ship, then you shot another, then you shot another but there was no real sense of progression."

While Braben was working on *Fighter* and preparing to join Cambridge's Jesus College, another young coder was hard at work on his own space odyssey. Ian Bell was another Atom owner, and like Braben he was fascinated by the opportunities that creating games offered him. Unable to initially afford the Acorn's game pack because all his savings had gone on paying for his £120 Atom, Bell happily worked on his own creations, with his first successful effort being a translation of the popular board game *Othello*. Once he could finally afford the game pack he quickly discovered that they weren't a patch on his own creations and continued to mess around with his Atom's innards. Like Braben, Bell quickly uncovered the secrets to the Holy Grail that was assembly language and, coincidentally, he also created his own 3D space routine that would eventually morph into *Freefall*, a game he began to work on for Acornsoft. But why was Bell so intrigued with the Atom when other machines were available? "Because it was quite simply the best home microcomputer at the time," he explains.

Upon attending Jesus College, Braben and Bell quickly discovered that they shared a great many interests and that they were both working on similar home projects. "We got chatting about our space games and how demotivating it was that there was no way of regulating progression within the game," recalls Braben about one of their early conversations.

Luckily for Braben and Bell those early talks proved to be incredibly fruitful and planted the seeds that would eventually form into *Elite*. "We started to come up with all sorts of ways [to enhance progression] like 'you could buy new parts for your spaceship', 'but where would the money come from?', 'well, how about trading?'" continues Braben. "Our only real concern was that we were afraid it might be seen as very boring."

SO NEAR, YET SO FAR

THE HIGHEST FORM OF FLATTERY?

When you have a game that's as ground-breaking as *Elite*, it's inevitable that other developers will want to jump on the bandwagon and Braben and Bell's opus soon inspired a host of similar games and out-and-out clones. One such example was Gremlin's *FOFT* (*Federation Of Free Traders*) for the Amiga and Atari ST, which wasn't so much inspired by *Elite*, but ripped it off wholesale. "It was a complete rip-off, you can't really say any more than that," begins Braben. "I guess you could see it as an honour. For example, the Electronic Arts game *Privateer* had many elements of *Elite* in it, but they at least dealt with it in a very different way. When *Federation* came out it was just blatantly the same game and it annoyed me." Fortunately, there were a great many games out there that were prepared to try to forge their own paths, although interestingly, they've never quite managed to capture the same atmosphere. "I'm really not sure," begins Bell when we ask him why later games have never been deemed equal to *Elite*. "It was a big advance over everything else at the time. It's much harder to do that now." Braben feels differently. "To an extent they capture the atmosphere of *Elite* but they never really embrace what the concept of *Elite* is. They certainly capture elements of it, but never the whole thing. I think they do capture the wonder though."

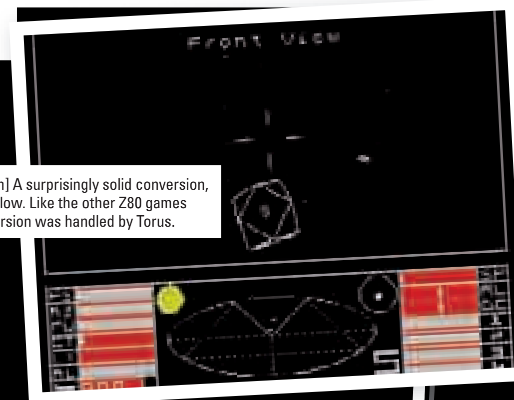




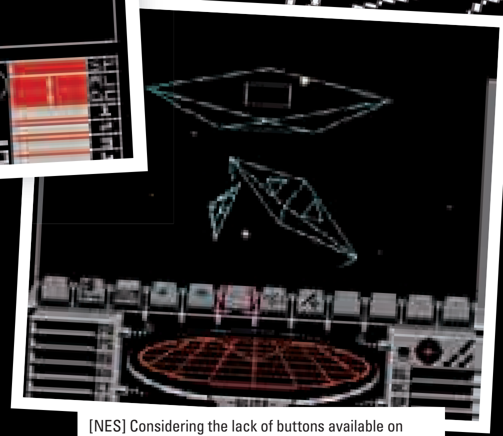
While *Federation Of Free Traders* (right) was seen as little more than an *Elite* rip-off, CCP's *Eve Online* (right, above) is brave enough to go off in its own direction.

THE HISTORY OF…

ELITE



[Spectrum] A surprisingly solid conversion, if a little slow. Like the other Z80 games the conversion was handled by Torus.



[NES] Considering the lack of buttons available on Nintendo's console, this is a truly impressive effort and features great graphics and a solid control system.

Nevertheless, despite early reservations about how their future project would be perceived by others Braben and Bell decided to join forces, with the inspiration for *Elite* coming from a variety of different sources. Both undergraduates loved the docking sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, while the role-playing *Traveller* featured many of the elements that would appear in the final game. It also happens to be the origin of Commander Jameson, the default pilot of *Elite*'s Cobra Mk III, should you choose to not create your own. ilms and TV shows that provided inspiration included *Battlestar Galactica*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* and a certain film by George Lucas called *Star Wars*. "Although *Elite* is set in a much bleaker world than *Star Wars*, the concept of flying to completely different places was very attractive," recalls Braben. Books also proved to be a valuable source of information, especially for Bell who cites the works of such famous authors as Arthur C Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle as major sources of inspiration. Then, of course, there was the majestic *Star Raiders*, an Atari 8-bit release by Doug Neubauer that was released in 1979.

One thing we were interested in knowing was how much of the two separate projects ended up appearing in *Elite*. According to Bell, few elements from *Freefall* ended up in the final product. "None really," he begins. "The truncated cube space station was reminiscent of the shape of the 2D *Freefall* space station so I called the *Elite* stations Coriolis Class after the *Freefall* space station, and Thargoid echoed the Batoids and Waspoids, but they were fundamentally disconnected games."

With their heads brimming with new ideas and possibilities, it was time to ship their idea around and see if anyone was as excited about their project as they were. Did they have any actual problems finding a publisher? "Yes we did," is Braben's somewhat expected reply. "Before I went to university I had a brief contract with a company called Thorn EMI and they offered me a job, but that would have meant me not going to university so I didn't take it. So later we approached Thorn EMI with a running, fairly final version of *Elite* – ie the trade, flight, dock had all been completed. And they said, "This is all very interesting, very technical, but for us to go with this, for us to actually publish it we would need a game with a score and with three lives." Essentially they wanted us to churn out what was a typical game of the time. I was a bit horrified about that and more than a little crestfallen. *Elite* was also the first game that required a tape to save to and they were like, "People aren't going to want to provide their own tapes, as that will make the game even more expensive." There was a lot of negativity there, but I also felt that they didn't really get it. Essentially, Ian and myself had written a game for ourselves, rather than thinking what's the target market, what do people want, and that's essentially how Thorn EMI left it. In contrast, we then approached Acorn [where Bell had his contract] and the difference was astonishing because they were actually gamers and they were really excited. In fact, they got other people from the office to crowd around and look at it. That contrast for us was huge so there was no question in our minds that we should go to Acorn. And besides, Thorn had rejected us so it wasn't like we had a choice."

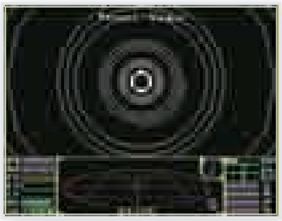
With a publisher in place, Braben and Bell continued their ambitious project. While the pair finished off *Elite*, Acornsoft began working on a huge publicity campaign, which immediately helped the incoming game to stand apart from its peers (see 'Prepare To Launch' boxout). "*Elite* took something like two years for us to fully complete," recalls Braben about its development time. "The game was actually completed long before it was released so we were able to tweak and test it and write the manual. We didn't encounter any particular problems while working on the BBC version."

The extra time and effort allowed *Elite* to truly shine upon its eventual release in 1984 and it soon became obvious that a lot of care, attention and undeniable talent had gone into *Elite*'s conception. Originally



Firebird's classic advertising is instantly recognisable and sums up *Elite* perfectly. Oh, and if anyone's interested, Braben's favourite profession is a bounty hunter, while Bell prefers to trade dangerous routes.







NOTABLE CONVERSIONS OF ELITE

AMSTRAD CPC 464
Being huge fans of Amstrad's machine we'd love to say it's the best version of the lot, but that would be telling porky pies of the highest order. It's certainly an adequate conversion, and the included rendition of the *Blue Danube Waltz* isn't too ear jarring, but it's far too slow to actually play through. It also lacks a couple of the ships – Transporter and Anaconda – that appeared in the original game.

NES
Playing *Elite* on a console may sound like a needlessly fiddly task, but this brilliant effort proves that the classic hit could appear on any system provided a little foresight was included. Thanks to a very intuitive menu bar, the NES version turned out to be a great success and received plenty of positive reviews upon its release. Amazingly, it never received a US release and remains one of the NES's most involving titles.

COMMODORE 64
It's a case of swings and roundabouts with this C64 version. While it runs slower than the original BBC version (sorry, it's true), it does boast a number of enhancements that didn't appear in Bell and Braben's original. There are several new missions, all the bugs have been ironed out and a new alien race called the Trumbles has been included. It's a solid effort, but we prefer the speed of the original.

ARCHIMEDES
Released in 1991, this is an astounding adaptation of *Elite* that really went to town. There were more ships than ever before; the AI had been greatly increased, while other ships would constantly participate in battles, giving you a far greater sense of immersion than ever before. If that wasn't enough, the game came with some decent freebies including a great looking poster and ship data cards.

AMIGA
While the Atari ST version (also developed by Mr Micro) is perfectly acceptable, we've always preferred the Amiga version of *Elite*. Not only is it far smoother than its ST counterpart, it also boasts greatly improved combat, and as a result is far more exciting to play. The only thing we don't like about it (and it's the same issue with other later versions) is that everything looks too darned pretty.

released in tape forms for the Acorn Electron and BBC B, and also on disc for the BBC B, Braben and Bell's game received extremely favourable reviews. BBC and Acorn owners suddenly had access to a game where they could effectively do anything (within the constructs of what was actually available, of course). Indeed, ask 100 gamers to name their favourite moment in *Elite* and you're likely to get 100 different answers, such was the game's freedom. Sandbox gaming is a term that's freely thrown about in today's world of *Grand Theft Auto*s, *Saints Rows* and *Crackdown*s, but in actuality the genre was alive and well in games like *Elite*, the industry simply didn't know the correct term.

Elite sold and sold until it actually sold around 150,000 copies for the BBC Micro, virtually the same number of machines that had apparently been sold – a stunning attach rate that today's console companies would kill for. When sales first reached 100,000 a news story ran on the BBC evening news, but this fervour of excitement was nothing compared to the frenzied bidding war that began when it became clear that publishers felt *Elite* deserved to be on other systems as well.

Back when Braben and Bell's contract for *Elite* had first been created, Acornsoft had been unable to offer the pair the high royalty rate they had asked for. Instead, the canny pair were able to keep the rights to publish the game on other systems. Some 18 months later, when *Elite* was selling like gangbusters, it had become so popular that an auction ended up being held for the rights. British Telecom's software arm, Telecomsoft eventually won the auction (which became a news story in itself) and conversions began to appear on its Firebird label. "Not giving them [Acornsoft] all the rights to the different versions proved very beneficial to us," recalls Braben. "We got a very good deal indeed."

With Telecomsoft wanting to see a return on its investment, Braben and Bell soon started to work on the various conversions. "We did a lot of the



[C64] "That's no moon, it's a space station." Actually it's a planet but we thought the *Star Wars* reference was funny.



[DOS] Docking could be incredibly frustrating and required plenty of practice in order to perfect it.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

MASTERFUL REMAKES OR COMPLETE RIP-OFFS... HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE GAMES THAT ELITE WENT ON TO INSPIRE



FOFT (FEDERATION OF FREE TRADERS)
Released: 1988
Systems: Amiga, Atari ST
Federation Of Free Traders certainly tries its hardest, but there's no denying that it's nothing more than a poor man's *Elite*. While the Amiga version was able to fix all the flaws that were found in the Atari ST original, its biggest oversight is that there's no real sense of progression because you can power-up your ship to insane levels by simply playing the market before you've even left port. As a result *FOFT* became utterly pointless.



EVE ONLINE
Released: 2003
Systems: Windows, Mac, Linux
Seen by many gamers as a spiritual successor to *Elite*, *Eve Online* is an MMORPG set in deep space and is published and developed by CCP Games. Players can take on a variety of different professions throughout their career and can explore a universe that contains over 5,000 solar systems. Unlike similar MMORPGs, *Eve Online* does not use an experience-point system and instead opts for a system that allows for skills to grow in real-time.



FREELANCER
Released: 2003
Systems: Microsoft Windows
Freelancer's subtitle is *The Universe Of Possibility.* This is more than a little misleading, as Digital Anvil's unofficial follow-up to *Wing Commander: Privateer* lacks many of the features – automated flight manoeuvres, thousands of online players – that designer Chris Roberts originally promised. It's certainly an ambitious title and a more than worthy follow-up to *StarLancer*, but it could have arguably been so much better. One of the greatest missed opportunities of recent times.



X: BEYOND THE FRONTIER
Released: 1999
Systems: Microsoft Windows
Considering *Elite*'s age, it's amazing that it was able to get so many things right from the very off. *X: Beyond The Frontier* arrived 15 years later but still made annoying mistakes that the original space classic had neatly sidestepped. Although it featured a great sense of immersion, many gamers were frustrated with their woefully underrated ship – you started off with no weaponry – and the laughable combat that saw enemy craft do little more than ram into you.



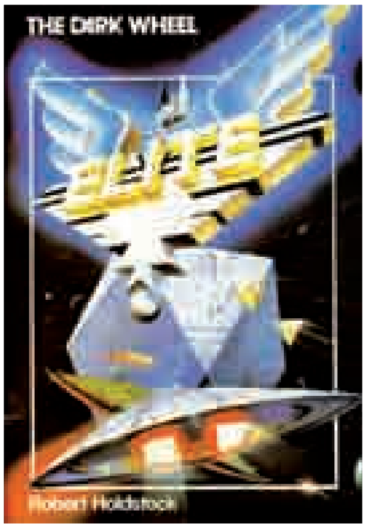
WING COMMANDER: PRIVATEER
Released: 1993
Systems: DOS, Apple Mac
Out of all the *Wing Commander* games that are available, *Privateer* and its expansion pack, *Righteous Fire*, share the most in common with Braben and Bell's *Elite*. Taking on the role of Grayson Burrows, the player is able to land on planets and bases, jump across different star systems by using specific jump points and gets to trade with a variety of equipment, weapons and other times with numerous aliens. It's far more freewheeling than the rest of the rigidly structured *Wing Commander* series and boasts greater open-ended gameplay.

> "INSPIRATION FOR ELITE CAME FROM A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT SOURCES, FROM 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY TO STAR WARS"

THE HISTORY OF…

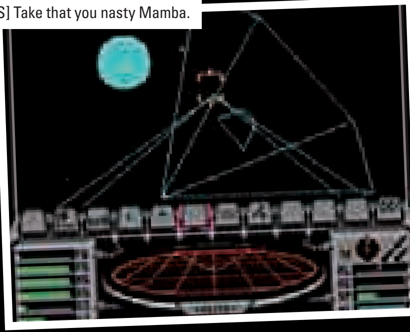
ELITE

PREPARE TO LAUNCH



The owners at Acornsoft knew that they had something special on their hands with the incoming release of *Elite*, so they pulled out all the stops to ensure that gamers would know that they had purchased something very special.
The original release came with a ludicrous amount of extras that ranged from the massive manual to a forgery-proof sepia postcard that enabled you to enter a competition to become 'Elite'. Then there was the excellent novella *The Dark Wheel*, that was found within the lavish packaging. As well as being a genuinely enjoyable read in its own right, it also acts as an entry guide to *Elite*'s world and features many elements that are in the actual game. If you don't have your own copy of *Elite*, the complete transcript for *The Dark Wheel* can be found at Ian Bell's homepage www.iancgbell.clara.net/elite/dkwheel.htm.
Acornsoft's biggest masterstroke was its decision to launch *Elite* at Thorpe Park in 1984 (the world's first underground rollercoaster had just opened there). Launch parties for games were unheard of at the time and the people that attended were treated to a private unveiling by Braben and Bell, which consisted of a BBC Micro, hooked up to a huge TV. *Elite* had arrived and it wasn't taking any prisoners.

[NES] Take that you nasty Mamba.



conversions ourselves," says Braben. "We worked on the Commodore 64 conversion, the Apple II, the NES and many others, while a company called Torus did the Z80 processor versions, which included the Spectrum and the Amstrad."

While great lengths were made to ensure that these later versions were just as good as their Micro counterparts, different processors meant this wasn't always possible, and sometimes certain omissions had to be made. The Amstrad CPC port, for example, had a couple of missing ships – the Anaconda and Transport – and mission differences, while the Spectrum version was noticeably slower than its BBC counterpart. Interestingly, the Spectrum outing was also the first major release to use the Lenslock protection device, which was essentially a plastic decoding lens that was used to decrypt a hidden access code.

One thing that Bell and Braben did try to do though was to continually add new missions to later versions of the game, with a noticeable example being the Trumbles that appear in the Commodore 64 outing. Based on *Star Trek*'s tribbles they quickly multiply until they fill your Cobra Mk III's precious cargo hold and start appearing on your craft's dashboard. They can only be destroyed by sun skimming (essentially flying close to the surface of the sun and burning them). Such were fan's devotions to the game that many of them would continue to buy later versions just so they could play the new missions that had been included.

While many of the conversions (especially the 8-bit offerings) were almost as critically acclaimed as the BBC original, special mention must go to Warren Burch and Clive Gringras's excellent Acorn Archimedes version, *ArcElite*, and Braben and Bell's very own NES conversion, which featured a brilliant and easily accessible icon strip – actually taken from *Elite*'s sequel, *Frontier* – to make up for the machine's lack of keys.

"It's really difficult to say, but I would probably say the BBC Micro one, the first one, because it was so close to my heart," explains Braben, when we ask him what his favourite version of *Elite* is. "In terms of the best to play though it's difficult to tell. The BBC Master version came a little bit later and was very nice because we could tweak little aspects of it and that was lovely to play. The NES version was also very good as well." Bell also has a fondness for the BBC and cites the disk version as his favourite. "It exploits the underlying machine capacity more comprehensively than the later BBC enhanced versions," is his reason. "Playing BBC 6502 Second processor *Elite* was far smoother and more colourful, but I always liked the purity of the disk version."

With *Elite* a huge hit on virtually every format it appeared on, discussion soon began to move to a sequel, but it would be a sequel that would lack the input of Bell. "After we completed all the different versions of *Elite* we essentially became 'Elited out'," says Braben. "Although Ian and myself had already started a punitive sequel to *Elite*, it didn't actually go anywhere. Ian, I think, wasn't really motivated to work any more, so we split the tasks up but it eventually became myself working on it." Bell and Braben soon parted ways and to this day they are no longer on speaking terms.

Braben still had a game to make though, and without the input of Bell and the sheer scale of his next project, he found *Frontier: Elite II* to be a thoroughly draining experience that had a far longer development time than its predecessor. "It definitely took a lot longer to program," recalls Braben. "It was something over five years and the reason for that was because it was very much a bigger game and concept. Also, I was working on my own, Ian wasn't involved at all, so it just took a lot longer for me to do. After that I finally decided that I didn't want to do another solo project. To be honest, when I first did the graphics for *Frontier* they were truly ground-breaking, whereas by 1993 when it came out they just weren't. It was okay and still looked kind of interesting compared to other games out there but it wasn't as far ahead as it could have been. So I lost a lot of time on it."

> "WITHOUT THE INPUT OF BELL AND THE SHEER SCALE OF HIS NEXT PROJECT, BRABEN FOUND FRONTIER: ELITE II TO BE VERY DRAINING"

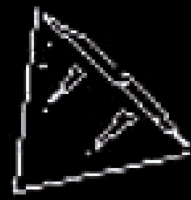
Another difference that Braben experienced was the tremendous pressure he found himself under from new publisher Gametek. Something he was far from happy about. "It was much more of a commercial environment," says Braben about the changing industry. "I signed with Konami, who I thought would be quite a good publisher for me, but for whatever reason they

PROCEED WITH CAUTION



When Braben and Bell first set about constructing the *Elite* universe, they wanted to create a world of limitless possibilities that would allow the player to experience a sense of freedom that no other game could offer. Frustratingly for the duo, the BBC's small memory meant that they had to find a way to make their game feel as vast as possible without compromising on the many elements they wanted to include.
The pair eventually decided to procedurally generate *Elite*'s galaxies and proudly told Acornsoft that it would contain 2^{48} (approximately 281,000,000,000,000) total galaxies. The ambitious figure was eventually dropped when Acornsoft pointed out that such a huge figure would make the artificiality of *Elite*'s universe obvious to the player and that many of the galaxies would look identical. Braben and Bell relented and dropped the number of galaxies down to a more manageable eight. With each galaxy containing 256 planets this was still an impressive figure and allowed the player to feel that they were exploring a truly gigantic world.



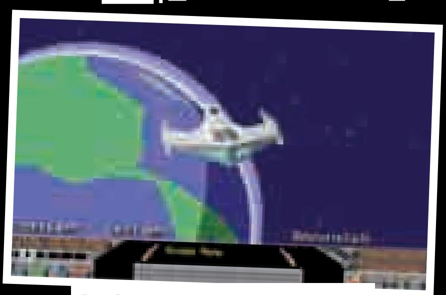


ELITE FOREVER

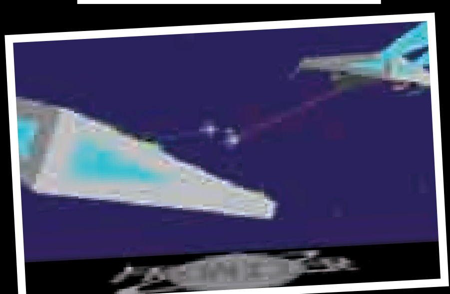
Elite's impact was notably huge with fans, but how did it affect other developers? We managed to track down a few coders of old to find out how Braben and Bell's game influenced them.

"*Elite* quickly became legendary and incredible for the 'galaxy in a box', which was a brilliant example of where people's minds filled in the many blanks," recalls Team 17's Martyn Brown. "Yes, I loved it, but do recall it being quite brutally difficult, but then I was never really good at games, mostly harmless you might say."

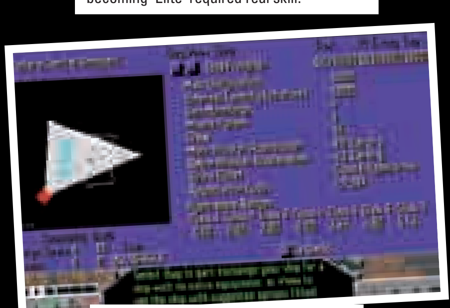
"The thing that struck me most with *Elite* was just how vast it was… it was the first game you could go on and on playing forever without ever getting to the end," recalls Jon Hare. "At Sensible it inspired us to start development of a 3D space game the name of which, '*The Day The Universe Died*', was selected by myself and Chris from a bunch of suggestions that were sent in by readers of *Zzap!64*. We liked the name because it was so poor. Unfortunately, the game was never finished."



[DOS] Due to *Frontier*'s lengthy development period its graphics were no longer cutting-edge when it was eventually released.



[Atari ST] Combat was far trickier in *Frontier* due to its realistic physics. As a result, becoming 'Elite' required real skill.



[Amiga] Being able to exchange your ship for a new craft was just one of the benefits that *Frontier* offered over *Elite*.

restructured and sold their operation to a brand new company called Gametek. I hadn't heard of them and was very sceptical, so I didn't agree to the transfer, which is why Konami's name remains on the box. They did put me under pressure, which is a shame, as I don't think *Frontier* got the same love and attention that it should have done, that *Elite* did get. You know, that period from when the game is actually finished and you polish it and make it really, really slick; and I think *Frontier* suffered because of that. I think it's still a great game, it just lost out in the quality stakes."

When *Frontier* was finally released in 1993, interference from Gametek meant that the game shipped with a number of annoying bugs, something that still frustrates Braben. "It's very upsetting. It's like seeing a baby with chocolate around its face. It's not that the game isn't great, it's just that it could have been that bit better." Despite Braben's concerns about *Frontier*, the Amiga version still received impressive scores, with practically all of them being in the mid-to-high Nineties, with the exception of *Amiga Power*, who awarded the 500 version 65% (ten per cent less than the faster and smoother 1200 offering).

"It just irritates me that people just want to make a point, they want to be seen and to try to get a little bit of notoriety from it," says Braben about the controversial score. "Essentially that's a reviewer not doing their job of reviewing something. They should give an honest opinion. If that was their honest opinion, then fair enough, but personally I doubt it. I just think they're trying to make a point. Similarly though, some of the reviews were actually probably too good, dare I say it. I think there were some very high 97s, which is a great thing and I'm sort of honoured by it. I've seen a number of reviews this year for games like *BioShock* and it's a great game, but giving it something like ten out of ten? After you've just criticised certain elements of it? It just doesn't make sense to me."

Despite its exceptionally high scores and glowing reviews, there were elements of *Frontier* that gamers did take exception to, with the most noticeable one being combat. The arcadey nature of the original *Elite* had completely changed because Braben had created *Frontier* with Newtonian physics. As a result, controlling your ship in the middle of a frenzied dogfight could make for an incredibly frustrating experience. Braben is convinced, however, that he made the right decision; "It was less fun," he admits, but the physics did make for a far more realistic experience. Even if it did result in a few problems. "It wasn't particularly difficult to create the physics," he admits. "The problem was getting the performance and I think that's where some of the issues come from, as there were quite a few rough edges there. Not so much so in the way that it all works, but the way it transitioned between different levels of detail. It could have been cleaned up."

There may have been issues with *Frontier*, but it was also obvious from its sales (an estimated 500,000) that there were a great many gamers out there who were prepared to buy into the *Elite* franchise. After all, *Frontier* offered exciting new elements like the ability to land on planets and the opportunity to fly in a variety of different ships. Imagine what a third game could offer…

The third game was *Frontier: First Encounters* and like *Frontier* before it, it bravely pushed the envelope that had first been opened by *Elite*. Huge in scale and with the same intense addition to realism that had

"THERE MAY HAVE BEEN ISSUES WITH FRONTIER, BUT IT STILL SOLD AN ESTIMATED 500,000 COPIES"

divided those who had played *Frontier*, it boasted vastly superior visuals – it made extensive use of texture mapping and Gouraud shading – and a new journal system that had not been seen in the franchise since the addition of *Elite*'s huge manual. Frustratingly for Braben, however, he once again faced pressure from Gametek that saw *First Encounters* being released long before it was actually ready. This time magazines were not so favourable to Braben's effort, with many of them complaining about the game's many bugs and seeing it as far from a complete product. The journals were a typical example of elements of the game that just lacked polish. "As with many things in *First Encounters*," recalls Braben, "it wasn't really fully realised."

"The real problem with *First Encounters* was that it was under an unreasonable amount of pressure," says Braben about the difficult project. "There was so much interference [from Gametek] that we offered all the money back so we could get out of the deal because I felt it was going to be a disaster. So that was a massive distraction and the game was nothing like what I wanted. As a lot of the hackers have already found out there was a lot of extra story in the game that was closed off for the final release, because part of it didn't even work. It was an accumulated thing and it eventually turned into a lawsuit, which, after a very long time I won, but that's the sort of thing that tends to get lost in the history of time. But it is a tragedy and when I say *Frontier* went out with chocolate on its face, this went out with something way worse than that. Some people will be rightly annoyed about that, but it's just one of those things and you have to put it down to experience."

First Encounters may have been something of a bitter pill to swallow for many fans of the franchise but it still harbours moments of brilliance and it has done nothing to diminish the anticipation for a fourth trip through the *Elite* universe. "*Elite 4* will be on this generation of technology but we're not announcing it yet," is all Braben would tell us about the highly anticipated sequel. But why after all these years does the original *Elite* remain such a hit with gamers – it was voted as the best game of all time by **Retro Gamer** readers in issue 9. "Does it remain popular?" asks Bell. "I think people have fond memories of it the same way they have fond memories of particular TV shows they grew up with, but I don't think *Elite* is played much by kids today." Braben's opinion on *Elite*'s success is more upbeat. "It's just a nice, well-rounded treatment of the world and I think that's what makes it so attractive," continues Braben. "Looking at the games now, they look very dated but nevertheless they are still a consistent view of the world, especially if you're into astronomy and things like that. Particularly, *Frontier* and *First Encounters* are extremely interesting in the way that they present stars. I still think there's a lot of interest there."

SPECIAL THANKS TO Neil Wallis for his spaceship models, MobyGames for additional screenshots and, of course, David Braben and Ian Bell.

RISTAR



Stuart Hunt travels to another planet to wake up Sega's most under-appreciated, self-effacing hero. You know the one that's spiky but yellow? Sonic Team's zip-soaring platform classic, Ristar





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM
» **RELEASED:** 1995
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-10



What ever happened to poor old Ristar? Continuously living in the shadow of a popular blue hedgehog, this fantastic sunny-looking chap achieved something that not even the big-headed butterball could manage: retain a clean sheet; a 100 per cent perfect gaming record. Okay, so it's a little bit unfair to compare Ristar to Mario and Sonic. After all, an ever-increasing chasm of over a hundred games and spin-offs sit between these three eponymous heroes. But why didn't Sega bless its yellow spiky one with his own sequel? He would have wholly deserved one, especially when the likes of Aero the Acro-Bat and Bubsy the Bobcat were allowed to go forth and commit some horrendous repeat crimes against double entendres and humanity.

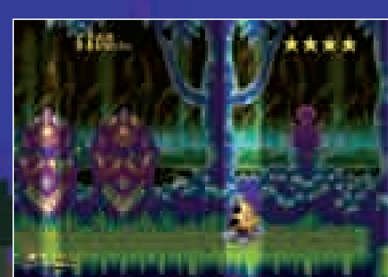
Now, if compiling a list of the most famous stars in history, a few names would certainly crop up. Well, arguably the most common, and probably sitting at the top of that list would be the Sun: star of the Danny Boyle film *Sunshine*. He's not overly chatty and didn't even bother turning up to the film's London premiere, opting to send his pale-looking stunt double instead. There's also the shooting star that appears in almost every Steven Spielberg flick, Lucas's menacing Death Star, oh, and we mustn't forget the star of Bethlehem that led three wise men to baby Jesus, without that star we'd have had no Christmas issue. So, there's a good chance that Ristar would fall in at around sixth, maybe even fifth place.

Now, despite their four year age gap, Sonic and Ristar are historically linked. Both of these characters share the same father. No, it's not Yuji Naka, but a nameless rabbit with extendable ears. You see, when Naka was first conjuring up a character to appear in his first platform game it was a bunny that he first had in mind. That was until he decided to bless his creation with the ability to roll into a ball and smash into his foes – not something you commonly see rabbits doing in the wild, unfortunately – and so the rabbit would be switched for a blue hedgehog.

After Sonic's release into a swathe of unprecedented popularity and critical acclaim, Yuji Naka would look back at his original rabbit concept to craft yet another platform videogame character. He would switch the extendable ears for extendable arms, and after a few more



» Ristar can put his environment to good use. Grab this cotton-wool bud to access a hidden treasure.



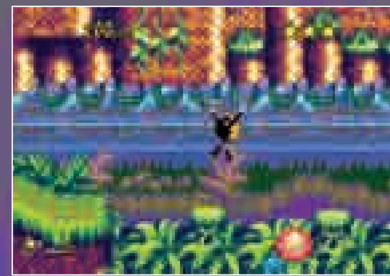
» The lighting effects throughout the game are some of the best on the Mega Drive.



» There's a possibility that this could be Naka's elusive wabbit!

subtle changes to the character – like swapping the rabbit for a boy-ish star in a pair of trainers – Ristar would be born. Despite the poor old carrot-consumer getting tossed to one side again, Naka's muse would still find a way to make it in to videogames. In the first Planet Flora stage of *Ristar* the player will encounter a peculiar-looking bunny, with long punching ears, that will jump out from behind a rustling bush and front up to our hero – a probable homage to that very early rabbit concept.

The differences between the *Sonic* and *Ristar* games come mainly from their pacing. Both games make great uses of their bountiful worlds, but where *Sonic* is a game that projects the player forward into a multitude of springs and loops effortlessly, *Ristar* is a game that requires much more care and attention. Ristar's outstretched gloves can grab onto enemies, swing from monkey bars, climb up walls and spin from switches. He's also blessed with a titanium forehead, so rather than stomping or spinning into his enemies, his attack is the act of grabbing an enemy's head and butting the poor



» Ristar's quite an agile little fella. Swing, monkey man!

sap until their nose bone gets forced up into their brain cavity. Yes, he might look like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but stars are notoriously hot-headed entities. So yes, it's probable that butter would melt, along with the plate and along with your arms.

The reasoning behind *Ristar*'s relatively short-lived career is not really of his own doing. The game was a final gift by Sonic Team to the Mega Drive and as such was released in the latter stages of the console's life. The quality and brilliance of the game was overshadowed by the visual glare of 32-bit gaming and also a certain re-emergence to the gaming circuit by a girlfriend-stealing simian.

For many platform enthusiasts, *Ristar* is raised up higher than the *Sonic* games, and it's easy to understand why. *Ristar* was, and still is, a wonderful-looking game. Each of its planetary parallax-packed levels is beautifully drawn and it's rammed with a quirky array of colourful bopping enemies that flit in and out of the screen. *Ristar* is a game full of life, character, sunny delight, wonderful cartoon animations, great bosses, a unique method of disposing of said bosses and a rather annoying underwater level… everything you could possibly ask for in a top-draw platform game. And despite existing in the most over-saturated genre of its time, it still somehow managed to feel completely fresh. A shining light in a sky packed with glistening stars, you might say.



» Erm, more *Sonic* evidence we thinks.



» When Ristar receives a good kicking, he dies in a somewhat melodramatic fashion.

"FOR MANY PLATFORM ENTHUSIASTS, RISTAR IS RAISED HIGHER THAN THE SONIC GAMES, AND IT'S QUITE EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PHANTASY STAR
SYSTEM: MASTER SYSTEM
YEAR: 1987

NIGHTS INTO DREAMS
SYSTEM: SATURN
YEAR: 1996

BURNING RANGERS
SYSTEM: SATURN
YEAR: 1998





FEEL FAMILIAR?

Ristar shares more than just a few passing resemblances with Sonic Team's eponymous blue hog. As well as looking similar, both sport trainers and have spikes. Ristar's world and sublime cacophony was constructed using the same engine as the original *Sonic* game. Also, it's worth mentioning that the Japanese version of the game differs slightly from the Western release. In the Japanese intro, Ristar's mum can be seen stood over her son before he awakens. Also, it has a slightly gushier ending, with the boy-star running into the arms of his father after saving him from the nefarious Greedy. Below is some sublime fan art courtesy of Emerald Guardian, which gives a good impression of how Ristar might have originally looked in those early conceptual days.



THE MAKING OF...

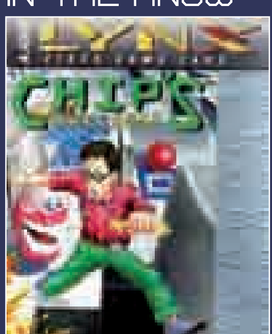
CHIP'S CHALLENGE

It was a tale of love, a pursuit driven by desire. And that was just the story of Chuck Sommerville the creator of Chip's Challenge. David Crookes takes a look at how Chuck created one of the best puzzle games ever made





IN THE KNOW



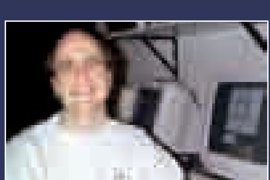
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI (ALSO US GOLD, EPYX AND MICROSOFT HOME)

» **DEVELOPER:** EPYX

» **RELEASED:** 1989

» **GENRE:** PUZZLE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



» *Chip's Challenge's* creator Chuck Sommerville, looking rightly pleased with himself.

Chip McCallahan was a nerd. More to the point, he was a nerd in love. And, like any nerd, he had to prove his worth; otherwise he wouldn't be allowed access to the exclusive Bit Buster Club. A refusal would spell disaster – for then there would be no chance of him ever impressing Melinda The Mental Marvel, the hot girl he met in the school science lab. And that, dear readers, is Chip's ever-so-slightly-difficult challenge.

It's a game full of problems, that's for sure. How else could you describe working your way around Melinda's clubhouse in order to impress? It may sound easy enough on paper, but when it is strewn with deadly monsters, cosmic chip sockets and – just as bad under the circumstances – many locked doors, then you do have to question just what Chip saw in the girl and whether it was all worth it.

And then you look at what went on behind the scenes as the game was meticulously put together. Substitute Melinda for Chuck Sommerville, the creator of the game, and Chip for the army of programmers who wanted in on Epyx's elite club and it becomes clear the game was a stark case of life imitating art.

"It was a little cloak and dagger in the building where I made *Chip's Challenge*," explains Chuck. "I was making the game for the Lynx – or 'Handy' as it was known back then – and I was in a closed area at Epyx with key-card access. I remember there being some resentment from the games programmers who weren't working on Lynx games. They felt excluded and shut out."

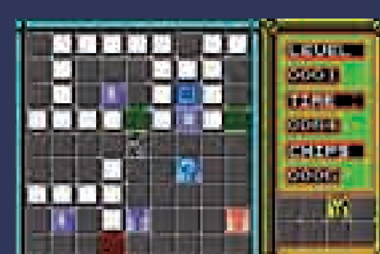
Epyx was very protective of its Handy project and it didn't want any details about the handheld to be leaked to the outside world. So it ensured that only a few people would know about the machine and its games and so the very best programmers were chosen; then ordered to keep quiet. It meant Chuck beavered away for ten weeks on *Chip's Challenge* in a kind of secret society; one that actually had an inner and outer core. Although Chuck stayed in the outer core, it didn't bother him. "I was just glad to be working on the Lynx because it had a fast rendering engine," he said. "It was a lot of fun and it allowed things to be done that we could never do on the Commodore 64."

The inner level of security surrounded the encryption team, which would take the final binary and add the 'magic touch' that would bless the code and let it run on a production unit. It is little wonder with all of this Blyton-esque secrecy that Chuck came up with the plot he did.

"The plot and the characters came towards the end of development," Chuck explains. "Maybe there were some parallels but I just wanted to create a high-tech game story. I invented the



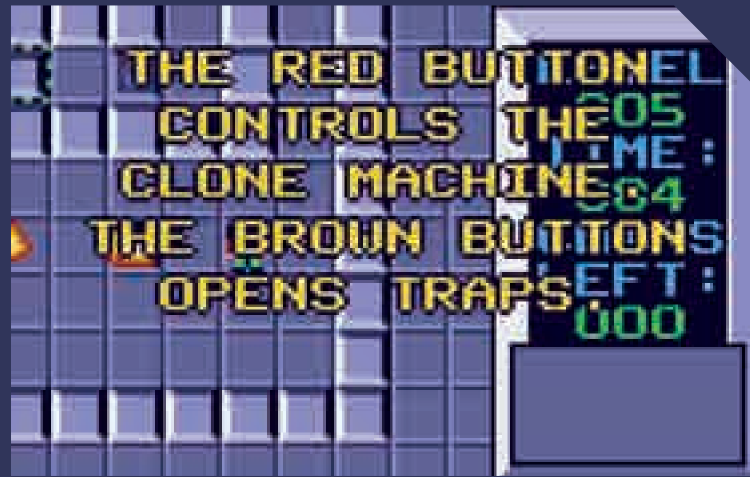
» **[Lynx]** Hmmm, this level makes us suspicious as it just looks far too easy; there must be more to it?



» **[Spectrum]** This is the first level of *Chip's Challenge*; it actually looks pretty tough for an opening level.



» **[Lynx]** The first few levels serve as tutorials to help ease you into the game.



» **[Lynx]** Walking over question marks on the floor will help you out if you get stuck.

name while in a conference meeting, intentionally taking the similarity between the name Chip and my name, Chuck. I also wanted a second meaning, so the dual description of Chip as the main character's name, and chip, as in a computer chip was also intentional."

Chip's Challenge had 148 levels (with an extra one later added to the Microsoft version). The final four levels were accessed only via a password and were treated as bonuses. The ending sequence plays after Level 144 so those unaware of the passwords or not able to find them miss out on the rest. It's worse for PC owners of the game since there are five bonus levels.

Some of the levels revolved around action, others were firmly puzzle-oriented. Some had time limits to urge the player on and add variety. The idea was that you used the Lynx's D-pad to move Chip around the levels. Once enough chips were collected, then it was possible to open the chip socket, leave and go to the next level. The player's score was also important. It was not just a matter of completing the game or a level but trying to amass as many points as possible – certainly more than a friend could manage.

The game wasn't the title that Chuck had initially intended on creating for the Lynx, however. "I had been working on a tank game of my own design for the Lynx," he explains. "I was trying to show off the Lynx with a simple polygon engine written by Steven Landrum [one of Epyx's main programmers and the guy behind *Summer Games*]. This game was supposed to be one of the original games to come out with the Lynx but it turned out it just wasn't going to work, so it was cancelled."

With the game canned and with Chuck not having anything else to do, he began to concentrate on thinking up some new game ideas. He knew time was tight and so he had to devise something that was relatively simple, yet enjoyable and eye-catching. He suggested a maze-style game.

"I called it '*Tile World*', because it would be based on a tile-type map," comments Chuck. "I wanted to borrow ideas from many games and put them together so they could be combined in countless ways. The only problem was time. I only had ten weeks to complete the project. Luckily, there were many engineers coming off the major development stage of their games, and just going into testing, so I had a pool of level designers."

Initially, however, Chuck could not gain company approval for the game's development so he began by knocking together a simple map and logic code in low-res on the Apple II. Colours defined the tile types. Once he had the game up and running, he was able to show it to his bosses at Epyx who decided it would be a fun title. It would also add to the roster of games that Epyx was keen to make available for its handheld. "The most important part was getting the go-ahead from Epyx," he says. "It was hectic, but I think it went smoothly."

Chuck's team got to work. They used a paint program on the Amiga to design the maps. By putting the art tool into grid mode, and putting little bar codes in the corners of the tiles, the saved artwork became the map file.

"IT WAS A LOT OF FUN AND IT ALLOWED THINGS TO BE DONE THAT WE COULD NEVER DO ON THE COMMODORE 64" CHUCK ON THE BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING FOR THE LYNX

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
SYSTEMS: C64, BBC, SPECTRUM, CPC, MASTER SYSTEM, ACORN ELECTRON
YEAR: 1984

CALIFORNIA GAMES
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, CPC, APPLE II, 2600, LYNX, ATARI ST, C64, DOS, MSX, NES, MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

ELECTROCOP (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: LYNX
YEAR: 1989



» [Lynx] When you make it through a level, the game gives you some lovely triumphant stats.



» [Lynx] Now what? Keys behind bombs, a raging fire… thinking things through with a time limit counting down is tough.



THE MAKING OF… CHIP'S CHALLENGE

IMPRESSING THE CHIEFS

One of the bosses who gave *Chip's Challenge* the go-ahead was Lynx co-creator Dave Needle. He said he was impressed straight away by the game although he only really saw its potential as the game went through the motions of being made. "*Chip's* was one of the few games that can actually hold my attention," he says. "Other than reading a Clancy novel or designing some electronic thing, I can't seem to do anything for more than 10 minutes without being bored to distraction. But I can play *Chip's* for an hour. I don't think I liked it when it was being developed, it seemed too easy, too predictable but it grew on me. After I had left Epyx, I was called by Sega to help them with the Game Gear. While I was out there with those guys, I spent most of my useless hotel time playing Chip's. It was engaging."



» The very cheesy looking advert for *Chip's Challenge*. Are you man enough to help Chip get into Melinda's exclusive club?



» **[Lynx]** The pushing blocks element, inspired by *Sokoban*, is an important part of many puzzles.

"We had a software tool that could read the codes from the art to build the maps," says Chuck. "I also hired Bill Darrah, who I knew to be a prolific puzzle designer, to design levels." Bill was one of Chuck's close friends and he was able to convey to him the results he required from his game. This partnership was so successful that, between them, they knocked out two-thirds of the levels.

"I continued to add new gaming elements as we went along," explains Chuck. "In the end, I designed about a third of the levels, Bill designed about a third and the rest were designed by other engineers and testers."

Although the original intention had been to make a different type of game entirely, Chuck was nevertheless pleased to be able to work on a puzzle game and *Chip's Challenge* remains the game he loves the most. "I wrote *Chip's Challenge* for myself," he says. "It was the game I always wanted to play. I had spent several years writing games designed by others, games that were chasing themes the marketing department thought they could sell. I wanted to make a game that was all about gameplay and this was it."

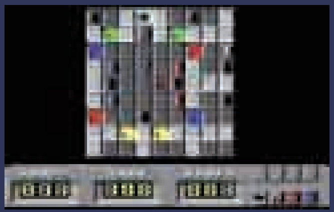
"IT WAS BOULDER DASH AND EMERALD MINE THAT REALLY SHOWED ME THAT A GAME LIKE THIS COULD WORK" CHUCK ON HIS INSPIRATIONS FOR CHIP'S CHALLENGE

Chuck says he has always liked maze games. "Even back in high school, I had this idea for a maze that could change when you stepped on certain buttons, making the maze much more complicated than it looked," he laughs. "But it was *Boulder Dash* and *Emerald Mine* that really showed me that a game like this could work."

Some of those influences are obvious. The block-pushing element is similar to *Sokoban*, for instance, and is used to clear paths and allow Chip to navigate around the playing area. To encourage the pick-up-and-play nature of the game, the first eight lessons were deliberately made easy and were, in essence, for tutorial purposes.

Yet even though it was a game Chuck had always wanted to create, he didn't have the whole concept planned out in his head from start to finish. He created it from his heart, discussed gaming elements with friends and took on board new perspectives. "I took each idea, and tweaked it to fit in with the rest," he recalls.

A crucial element to the game is its top-down view, one that retains the title's simplicity and helped to speed up its production. An isometric viewpoint was discarded almost immediately – "I also decided to get rid of any gravity component and stick with a straight top view" – and the team had no problems getting the game finished on schedule.


» **[C64]** Chip in a confusing-looking situation.

» **[Lynx]** You skid on the ice and you need to push blocks on to the water. It's not very easy.



» [Lynx] You can unlock further levels by finding the passwords.





» [Lynx] Guaranteed to get you on edge, there's not a lot of movement on this level.



» The Atari Lynx *Chip's Challenge* game cartridge. That big set of gnashers looks pretty scary.

"It was well timed," Chuck remembers. "About this period, the testing department was mostly done with the rest of the original Lynx games, so I had access to a small army of testers. I had each level tested to make sure that it was possible to complete and I also had each rated for fun and difficulty. The final stage was left to me. Based on the ratings, and my own judgement, I had to pick which levels and what order to put them in."

The game proved to be a great success – "Let's be clear though, it was never intended to be a *Tetris* beater" – and quickly became one of the Lynx's killer apps. But it wasn't long before the title was ported to other machines. In fact, it was translated to virtually every machine available at that time, including the Commodore 64 and the PC.

The PC version was converted by a games team at Microsoft, headed by Chuck's friend Tony Garcia. But Chuck wasn't very impressed with the result. "It's not a game I care too much for. Instead of sliding across in quarter-square increments, the monsters jump from square to square and that makes it harder to work out which direction they are going," he explains. The PC version also had an automatic save feature while the Lynx used passwords (entering MAND, incidentally, would give the player access to a Mandelbrot set and a Julia set fractal plotter).

But the fun doesn't stop there. Although *Chip's Challenge 2* is, sadly, not likely to ever see the light of day, the game still retains its many fans. Some of these have been developing their own levels and even Chuck gets involved by dishing out encouragement. One of the fruits of their labour is the *Chip's Challenge Level Pack 2* that has another set of 149 levels to play and there is also a tool called Chip Edit, which allows for users to create their own levels.

"I'm really pleased the game is still being played and that people still enjoy it," says Chuck proudly. "It's amazing, given that it only took ten weeks to make. It was unheard of even back then to be able to knock out a game in such a small amount of time. But that we did that and created what some people say is a classic is wonderful."

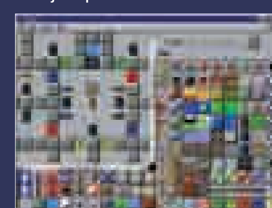
> "I HAD EACH LEVEL TESTED TO MAKE SURE THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE TO COMPLETE AND I ALSO HAD EACH RATED FOR FUN AND DIFFICULTY" CHUCK ON THE TESTING PROCESS


» [Amiga] "So many doors. Which one should I choose?"

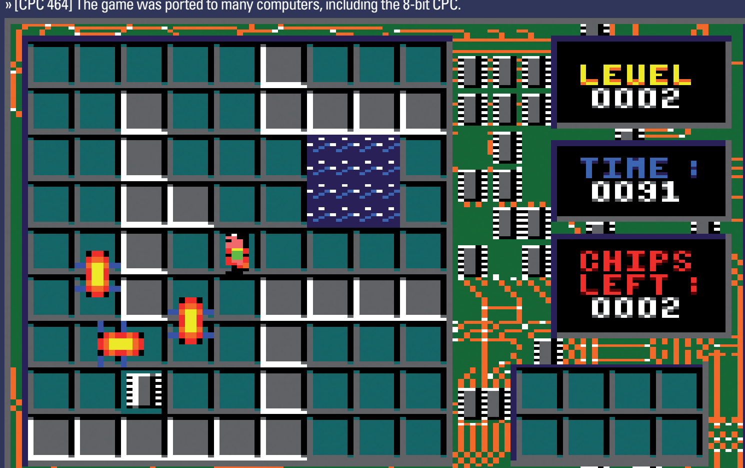
MORE CHIPS?

Although Chuck Sommerville has many screenshots for *Chip's Challenge 2,* he refused to share them with us. To do so, he explains, would only stoke the fires and encourage people to call for its release once again. "I try to downplay *CC2,*" he says. "It puts me in a difficult position because I have just put it behind me."

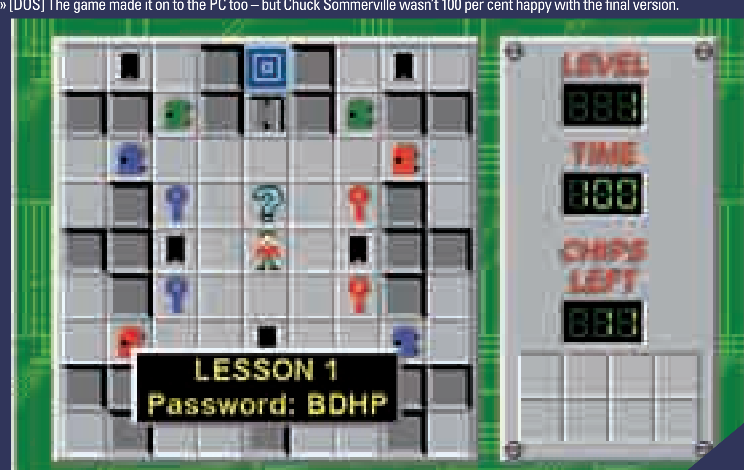
"I spent about two years working on CC2 with the agreement that the company that held the rights to the first game would work with me to get it published," he adds. "After I finished, they were not very helpful. But they also would not let me release it on my own. I spent a couple years really upset about it. For several years after that, about once a year, someone would approach me with some hopeful way to get the game to market, but each one eventually faded out. I finally decided to not be concerned about it any more, and just put it behind me."



» [CPC 464] The game was ported to many computers, including the 8-bit CPC.



» [DOS] The game made it on to the PC too – but Chuck Sommerville wasn't 100 per cent happy with the final version.



retro shamer

Terminator 2: Judgment Day

A BIG-BUDGET, HIGH-ACTION SCI-FI FILM WITH GUNS, CYBORGS, EXPLOSIONS, TIME TRAVEL AND AN AWESOME LEAD VILLAIN… SOUNDS LIKE IT WOULD MAKE FOR A GREAT GAME. SOUNDS LIKE. SO PUT ON YOUR DARK GLASSES AND LEATHER JACKET AND JOIN US AS CRAIG RITCHIE TAKES A LOOK AT ONE OF THE WORST WASTED MOVIE-LICENCES OF ALL TIME

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **GENRE:** VARIOUS
- » **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** CONTRA



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After being wowed by some of the first FMV sequences we'd ever seen in a home videogame (even if they were only two to three seconds long), snagged directly from the film, *Terminator 2* kicks off in a crappy side-on fight between T-800 and T-1000. You unload a round of bullets then walk up and punch or kick him. He falls into a pool of liquid metal on the floor, and then he stands up again. At which point you punch him before he can make a move. Cue pool of liquid, he stands up, you punch. Pool of liquid, stand, punch. Wash, rinse, repeat. The developer definitely did a good job of setting the bar for the rest of the game, as the complete lack of music, the tinny, unimpressive sound effects and the uninspired gameplay would accompany you for the rest of the 15 minutes it takes to finish this load of rubbish.

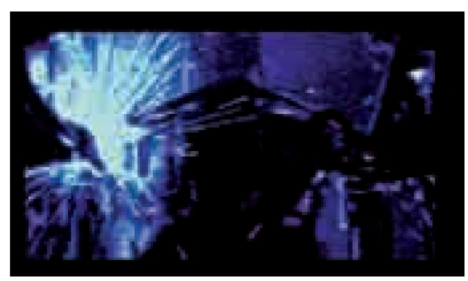


» There it is, the face we know and love.

It was 1991 and James Cameron's epic sequel to the robot-'em-up smash hit *Terminator* turned out to be the special-effects driven blockbuster of the year, with big guy Arnold Schwarzenegger reprising his role as good ol' T-800. This time, Arnie was not out to kill Sarah Connor, but rather to protect her now teenage son John from the newfangled liquid metal shape-shifting T-1000. John would grow up to be the future leader of the human resistance, and the machines had sent one of their own back in time to off the long-haired, arcade-game playing rascal. Awesome.

So, the movie was great and we were all gagging for the licensed game to allow us to relive the most memorable scenes. Pity, then, that the game ended up being so crap. See, while the Game Boy version, a completely different game, saw rave reviews and the arcade shoot-'em-up (in the style of *Operation Wolf*) was also great fun, the version that was released on the majority of home systems was an absolute stinker.

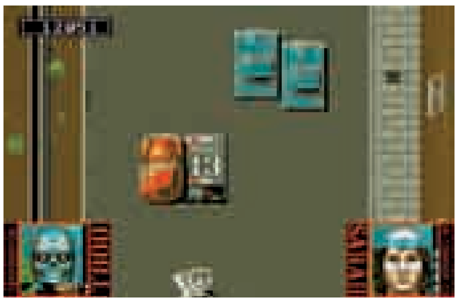
Terminator 2 is made up of a handful of short levels divided into three basic genres (side-on shooter/beat-'em-up, top-down driving, and juvenile puzzle) that, while offering variety, don't really bring much in the way of entertainment. The one-on-one levels are simply pathetic – if you start hitting fire as fast as you can just as the game is starting, you shoot T-1000 off the edge of the screen and you complete the level.



» If you can't make it out, that's them putting Arnie together. In quarter-screen three-second long FMV glory.



» This is Level 1. If you see this message, then you've done something wrong.



» The second, and much worse, driving level. Someone should have told the programmers that frustration does not equal fun.



» Follow the arrow to safety. See that grey thing at the bottom? That's the front of a truck, somehow.

retro shamer

POINTLESS PART



Easily the most unnecessary part of this game is the company logos everywhere. Check out the screens of what are no more than computerised versions of those plastic square rearranging puzzles. Say, developers, was that in case we forgot we were playing *Terminator 2*™ and that it was published by LJN®? Unnecessary. Second, and also pointless, are the arrows that appear in the motorcycle level. For some reason, there are bright red arrows giving you 'hints' as to which way to steer your bike. That is, the only challenge on this level is made null and void by the solution appearing as you play.

Why a super advanced cyborg is defeated once it goes out of view in a hospital or an office block is beyond us, but hey. Then comes the SWAT level, where you shoot at the coppers while walking practically unharmed into wave after wave of bullets. Shoot enough of them (by positioning yourself so that their diagonal bullets fly harmlessly overhead while yours hit dead on) and you progress to the next stage. Err, when does the fun start?

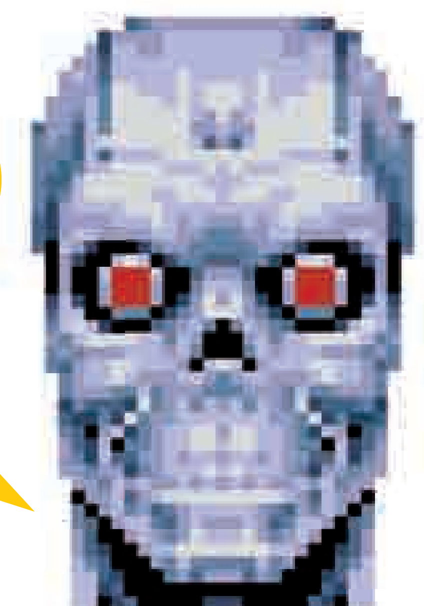
Now listen quietly. Hear that? The sound of no music at all? Yep, that's just how the game's soundtrack was during play. Add to this the fact that the few sound effects included are pure rubbish and that the visuals were of the lowest-common-denominator variety (hey, it's easier to churn out multi-platform ports that way) and all you are left with that was remotely impressive at the time were still shots of the actors and the occasional short video clip from the movie.

You also only have one life and no continues at all, perhaps a ploy used by the developer to add longevity to a title it knew sucked balls. It was frustratingly difficult at times until you figured out how the 'AI' (an insult to use the term here) was programmed, and then you could breeze through the game losing only minimal health. Appalling. So, if you happen to take a bad knock and die on Level 5, there you are sitting through exactly the same levels all over again just to see if you can go one better. And when you add to all this the fact that *Terminator 2*'s levels were really just derivative copies of the previous one's and that the entire game can be completed in well under 15 minutes (search YouTube for the video), you really can't help but feel that this was a shining example of producing a game as quickly as possible to cash in on the success of the movie, and that bucket loads of potential for a good game were thrown out the window as a result.

So look at the screenshots, dear reader, and behold everything there is to see in the utterly abysmal *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* multi-platform mess from LJN. We made the sorry, sorry decision of nabbing this title when it first came out, and it has been our pleasure running it into the ground over these two pages. Hasta la vista, Ocean.

[A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER]

Hello, I ahm the Governator. You may remember me from such catch phrases as "Hasta la vista, baby", "I'll be back" and "Vote for me in 2003." When not leading the good people of Kalee-for-nee-ya, I enjoy raking in royalties. As you can see, this game was a low point in my career, as I look like I ended up in a T-shirt three sizes too small and somehow aged to about 60 years old. Still, the artists gave me a good tan, despite coming from a dark, post-nuclear fyoo-cha. But hey, I can drive a bike like the best of 'em, give thumbs up while sinking into molten lead, and defeat a superior Terminator with a shotgun. Also, I think they made a *Terminator 3*, but I can't remember.



"THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF MAKING A GAME AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO CASH IN ON THE MOVIE'S SUCCESS"

POKÉMON SNAP

GOTTA SNAP 'EM ALL



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **GENRE:** SNAP-'EM-UP
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** N64
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+



HISTORY

Pokémon Snap **is a perfect example of a developer taking a classic franchise and evolving it into something that is almost completely unrecognisable and yet utterly fantastic at the same time. And no, we don't mean** ***Resident Evil: Survivor.***

The initial concept of *Snap* – travel on-rails around an island and photograph a variety of different Pokémon – sounds as far away from the original RPG as possible, but as you slowly explore the verdant paradise you discover many similarities between the two games. With the most obvious being the snapping of every single one of the island's Pokémon.

As you trundle along in your weird little buggy, various Pokémon will appear in front of you and you have a short amount of time to take the best possible picture. Points are awarded at the end of each stage and you'll gain bonuses on how well framed the critter is, how exciting the snap is, whether other Pokémon feature and other objectives.

Although your first trek is limited to a pleasant stroll along the island's beach, earning the required amount of points soon allows you access to other portions of the island. As the environment expands around you, so does *Snap*'s actual gameplay. You're gradually given a selection of different objects with which to entice Pokémon into more snap-able positions, and part of *Snap*'s fun is working out just how you're going to be able to take that perfect picture.

With only 60 odd different Pokémon to discover it's not going to take forever to find the majority of the beasts, but you soon start to discover that certain Pokémon can only be found in certain areas, so great cunning is required in order to take that elusive shot. Even though you can see most of what *Snap* has to offer in just a few short hours, you'll still find yourself returning to it because it's just so relaxing. Part interactive cartoon, part wildlife documentary, *Snap* has something for everybody and remains one of the N64's most unique games. It's now available on the Wii's Virtual Console, so why not give it a shot?





DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

IN THE SECOND OF OUR THREE-PART SERIES, MIKE TOOLEY LOOKS AT THE EVENTS AND PEOPLE THAT TRANSFORMED EA FROM A SOFTWARE DEVELOPER AND PUBLISHER INTO AN INDUSTRY STANDARD. A COMPANY THAT WOULD CHALLENGE, AND DEFEAT, THE SUPREMACY AND TIGHTENING GRIP THAT THE JAPANESE CONSOLE MAKERS WERE WIELDING OVER AN INDUSTRY THROUGH RESTRICTIVE LICENSING AGREEMENTS

Electronic Arts (PART 2 OF 3)

As the Eighties began to fade, gaming had started to fragment. As a term, videogame didn't cut it any more; the still embryonic industry was an eclectic mix of subsets: arcade games, home computer games and console games. Within this set were the genres that are still with us today, from sports, RPGs, shoot-'em-ups, puzzlers and platformers, through to beat-'em-ups and the RTE laser-disk games that populated gamers consciousness.

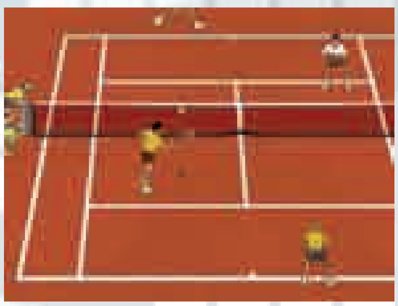
The heartbeat that drove this was a diverse collection of companies, run by industry veterans who had made their money from the games that they'd produced in the halcyon 8-bit days. The unstable years ahead would see many of these companies fail to adapt to the demands of a new gaming world and eventually close after incurring massive losses, largely because the guys at the top should never have been there; a great programmer is rarely a good businessman. Fortunately for Electronic Arts, it had Trip Hawkins. A shrewd operator, Trip has always had a feel for the next big thing, and this time around he had a company that was going to be a part of it.

Sega by now had given up on the Master System, having failed to dent the NES user base. Atari and Commodore as always were in a world of two, still convinced that their only competitors were each other, despite each companies ever-diminishing sales figures. Trip needed to plan the next few



EA began to lose popularity among gamers after Trip Hawkins left and Larry Probst took over the company.


Trip Hawkins, the man who started it all.


EA's one and only tennis game, *IMG International Tour Tennis*.

years for EA, but in such a fragmented market it was going to be expensive to develop for so many formats.

Trip explains this tumultuous period, saying, "Nintendo was a visionary and innovative company, and very principled about what they did and how and why they did it. Stubborn to a fault. Sega would basically copy Nintendo, but without any of the same convictions. Sega took advantage when Nintendo rested on their 8-bit laurels." As a footnote to this, way back in 1984 Trip had turned down the opportunity to become a Nintendo licensee, the terms offered weren't very different from the deal that Nintendo brokered to bring Rare on board. For Trip and EA though, it wasn't enough.

The problem Trip had was that there were really only two established 16-bit systems of note in the West, and he believed in neither. While the Amiga was doing well, Commodore's future plans for the system were lacklustre to say the least. Trip had always had an apathy for Atari since his days at Apple, and to date he blames Atari's management strategy as being largely responsible for the videogame crash of the Eighties, so the ST was never seen as viable by EA. Technology was always the combustion inside EA, and with Nintendo standing firm with the NES and stating that it was in no rush to deliver a 16-bit machine, Sega and its soon to be released Mega Drive seemed to be Trip's only outlet.

Before Trip would enter into negotiations with Sega to publish for its fledgling machine, he paid heed to a lawsuit that had just played out between Nintendo and Atari and its home division, Tengen. On 12 December 1988, Atari took Nintendo to court, accusing it of having an illegal monopoly on the videogame industry. It claimed it had achieved this through illegal practices such as price fixing, monopolistic business practices and the use of computer-chip lockout technology to stop unlicensed developers selling NES games. Things would soon get out of hand in this case with Tengen eventually being countersued by Nintendo. The disposition read, "Nintendo sues Tengen over patent violations, because Tengen, in order to bypass the licensee lockout chip, copied the 10NES program which is contained in the US CIC lockout chip. They gained this information when they were a Nintendo licensee, and using this fact tricked the US Patent Office into allowing them access to the needed data."

EA INSTANT EXPERT



Such was EA's despondency with Sega not listening to it in the early-Nineties and its disappointment with the Saturn that when the Dreamcast came around it refused to support the machine. With a games catalogue that consistently frequented the top-ten charts this turned out to be the first of many nails in the Dreamcast's coffin.

EA received the world's first online privacy seal in 1999 under the ESRB online certification programme, beating even Microsoft to the accolade.

Ultima Online reached 150,000 paying subscribers within 12 months of being launched, amazing to think that the world of online gaming was still dial-up in 1998.

In 1997 EA held an EA sports internet tour with a top prize of $65,000 for the winner.

In 1999 EA funded the movie *Wing Commander* based on the Origin games that it had published.

EA's exclusive deal with Sega for the Mega Drive meant that it could manufacture its own cartridges; these were hallmarked by a yellow tab that contained additional memory, as early Mega Drive games didn't save progress. It also made them more difficult to pirate.

Tiger Woods originally worked as a consultant on the *PGA* games. It was during this time that Nike made him a household name with the "I'm Tiger Woods" advert, which became an institution, and so he was sponsored to endorse the game as well.

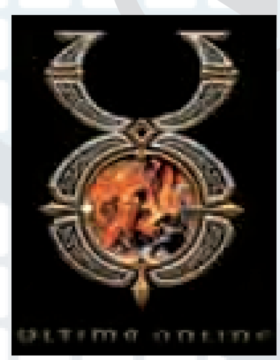
In John Madden 1992 on the Mega Drive, OJ Simpson is in the All-Madden team. However, he has been removed from all later releases.

3DO was so biased towards developers that the manufacturers were asked to run at a loss, instead finding value in the fact that they were producing the next big thing. Matsushita didn't agree and demanded a bigger cut, which led to the enormous price tag of the 3DO.

When EA developed the tools and operating system for the 3DO it also created the world's first audio and visual CD player. It has only been equalled with the present generation.

> "TRIP ALWAYS HAD A FEEL FOR THE NEXT BIG THING, AND THIS TIME AROUND HE HAD A COMPANY THAT WAS GOING TO BE A PART OF IT"

Sega, meanwhile, found that bringing the arcade home wasn't as easy as it thought it would be, with lacklustre launches across Japan and a less than stellar roster of games available, the attach rate was very low. Bizarrely, Trip believed in the Mega Drive, he could see a market for it and so set the EA research and development teams about backward engineering the machine. The R&D teams presented Trip with proposals for converting EA's existing line-up to the machine, and an evolution of EA's creation tools to allow for rapid game development. With this in mind, Trip took possibly the biggest gamble he ever would at EA; if it didn't work and Sega followed the Nintendo route, EA could lose its liquidity and freedom of choice. He directed his staff to enter into formal negotiations for a licensing deal with Sega, insisting on terms


Ultima was created by Origin, who EA took over in 1992.

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

EA GETS BUSY

Notable Acquisitions

ORIGIN SYSTEMS 1992
In 1992 EA acquired Origin Systems, Inc, a leading computer games developer based in Austin, Texas, with net revenues of $121 million. Origin was best known for its *Ultima* series of fantasy role-playing games in personal computer diskette and CD-ROM formats. Origin would later develop the *Wing Commander* series for EA.

VICTOR MUSICAL INDUSTRIES 1992
In September of 1992 EA formed a joint venture with Japan's Victor Musical Industries, Inc. The Tokyo-based company, called Electronic Arts Victor, Inc, translated and distributed EA's games for the Japanese market and several other Asian countries. During 1993, EA's sales in Japan increased by 140 per cent.

DISTINCTIVE SOFTWARE 1991
Distinctive, as EA Canada, would go on to be the most prolific games maker EA had. Starting with *FIFA* and then *Need For Speed*, the team here would deliver so many key franchises that they would become integral to EA's continuing success. From *Medal Of Honor* right through to *Warcraft*, *Command & Conquer* and *SSX* it touched all of EA's great franchises.

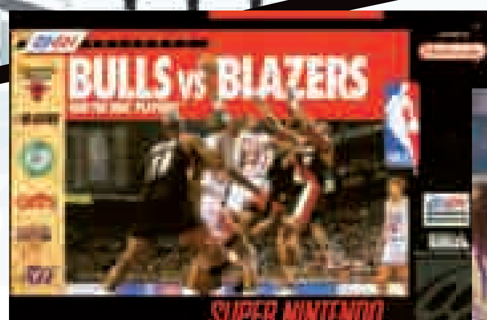
BULLFROG 1995
While EA published Bullfrog games in the Eighties, it bought the company in the Nineties. At first Molyneux and Co rose to the challenge of a global market with some of their best work, but eventually the deadlines and output became too much and Molyneux moved on. Not before he treated us all to *Magic Carpet* and *Syndicate* though. Later Bullfrog/EA offerings were awful.

CRITERION 2004
EA shook the gaming world when it purchased Criterion. Not only had it bought the talent that brought the *Burnout* series to the masses, it also now owned the RenderWare middleware technology that Criterion licensed to other game developers. EA had, therefore, found a way of making money out of its competitors.

WESTWOOD STUDIOS 1998
EA doesn't always get it right. After buying Westwood in 1998 many workers left, *Command & Conquer: Red Alert* sneaked out along with *Nox* and the MMORPG *Earth & Beyond* before EA liquidated the studio for not meeting its targets in 2003. $115 million well spent? EA still uses the IP though.



Immercenary proved that Electronic Arts wasn't afraid to take risks. A bold release...



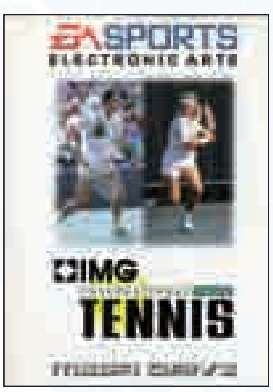
One of EA's releases on the SNES, most of which turned out to be weak Mega Drive ports.



Road Rash on the 3DO was utterly superb and proved to be an essential title.



If you owned the above, you were very rich or very, very lucky.



EA's only tennis game proved to be one of its least popular sports games.

favourable to EA. EA would get to make as many games as it wanted with a reduction in the licensing fees others were paying to develop for the format. Sega said no. It planned to impose a restrictive contract on EA just as it had done with its other licensees, one that echoed the Nintendo business model. Trip had anticipated this however, and pulled a one-two sucker punch on Sega. Acting on his direction, EA's negotiators brusquely informed Sega of America that it didn't have that kind of clout to throw around. Furthermore, EA had already reverse engineered the console and knew how to manufacture its own unlicensed Sega cartridges and would not hesitate to do so if it couldn't support the system officially. Wanting to avoid litigation and possible brand damage, Sega softened and at the 11th hour middle ground was found between the two. Within months the first slew of EA titles started to hit the Mega Drive. EA games began to appear for the Mega Drive as fast as the company could create them, Trip and Sega both wanted volume. The new and more sophisticated titles helped push console sales. First up were Will Harvey's *The Immortal* (an isometric-view RPG), *Budokan: The Martial Spirit* and the hastily rewritten first instalment of *John Madden Football*. *Madden* competed directly with Sega's *Joe Montana Football*, and a friendly rivalry grew between the two company's sports game divisions that would eventually result in the best 16-bit sports videogames ever created.

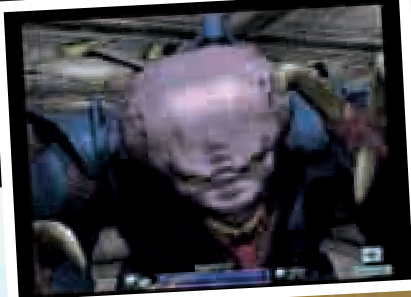
"The bottom line was that the hardware unit price came down and it opened a much larger consumer audience to videogames," says Trip. "Consoles were also simpler. You could just plug and play and only had to think about a few buttons. The big concern at the time was how Nintendo controlled everything. And going back to 8-bit when we'd been a 16-bit developer for years. I fought these issues by focusing on reverse-engineering Sega's 16-bit entry." But rarely is anything that simple. "A far bigger and tougher transition than I imagined, was going from home computers to consoles," Trip continues. "Many employees found that demeaning because the Sega Mega Drive was not as powerful, there was no printer, no modem, no read/write storage, too little memory, and so on. But the Mega Drive was a mass-market machine that would sell for less than $200 and it had two joysticks so that friends could play together. It was going to be huge for our sports business for that reason. But some employees quit over this transition, and many outside artists did not want to do console work, they thought that it was beneath them," he laments.

For the next few years the Amiga and Mega Drive would receive the bulk of EA's games. With some titles being downgraded and then published under licence by Konami on the NES, the games would come thick and fast. Almost all of EA's earlier work would appear on the Mega Drive and with annual updates to *Madden*, *Jordan Vs Bird* and *Lakers Versus Celtics*, EA featured more heavily in the Mega Drive chart than Sega.

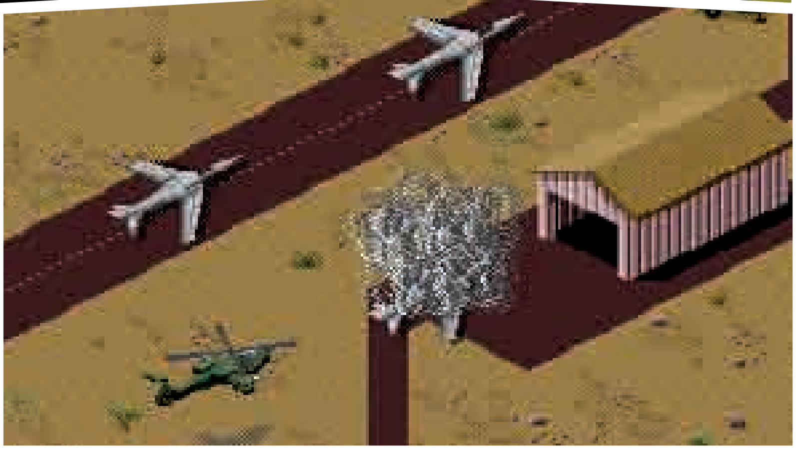
EA wasn't only about sports games though, it would bring *Populous* and *Powermonger* to consoles, games that hitherto were seen as computer games. And while Bullfrog's star shone brightly, other EA teams were delivering the *Strike* series and *Road Rash* to enamoured gamers. *StarFlight* and other EA back-catalogue games would also make the journey onto Sega's box of tricks. EA even started to tailor games for a younger audience with *Rolo To The Rescue*. With all bases covered it wasn't long before Nintendo came knocking. Although EA did eventually publish for the SNES, the releases were

THE SPORTS EFFECT

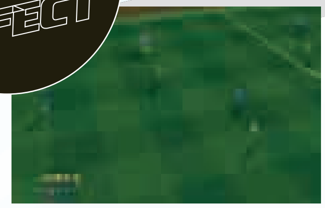






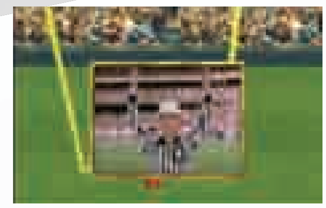


Desert Strike proved to be a great franchise and only fell out of favour when it reached the PlayStation.



FIFA International Soccer Mega Drive

EA took videogame sports kicking and screaming into the 16-bit era. The first iteration of *FIFA* was more than most people had hoped for. While other football games felt like videogames, *FIFA* added real team formations and strategies to the World Cup format. Coupled with physical feel to the ball and atmospheric crowd sounds, the modern sports game was born.



John Madden Football '93 Mega Drive

This was the best version of the 16-bit offerings of the *John Madden* franchise. It featured greatly improved visuals and its AI meant for an all-round better gaming experience. Finally being on the defence wasn't a drag, it was on a par with attacking aspect of the game. The addition of All Madden and classic teams meant that *John Madden Football '93* was a must-have title.



NHL '98 PSone/Saturn

Finally, the NHL would receive the same love as football and the NFL. A completely new engine added speed to the game that had been lacking in earlier incarnations. It was the multiplayer that shone though, the new game engine made it easier to track the on-screen action as furiously fought rivalries ensued. Only *NBA Jam* could hold a candle to its pace.



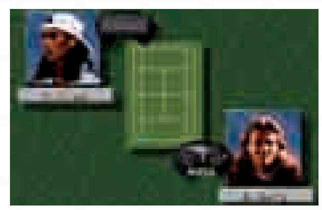
Cricket World Cup '99 PC

Easily the shortest lived of all the EA Sports franchises, this was actually a very good game that found only a limited audience. Realistic looking players and pitches are home to an engrossing if slightly difficult game. More of a simulation than the rest of Electronic Art's offerings, *Cricket World Cup '99* should not be overlooked.



Superbike World Championship PC

Where do you go after you bring a series like *Road Rash* to an end? Back to the source of course. Boasting an entire re-creation of the 1997 World Superbike Championship featuring all the details and nuances that we have come to expect from Electronic Arts. This really was a standout racer that was overlooked by all but a few.



IMG International Tour Tennis Mega Drive

Most people will say EA never released a tennis game, but they're wrong. Featuring 32 licensed players, the game was tough and needed much practice before you could enter a tournament successfully. Sadly, EA only had image rights for the US and a poor showing there, and an incredible price on the variable tennis licences mean this is EA's only dalliance with tennis.

weak ports of Mega Drive games that did little to push the hardware. EA, and its roster of sports titles, more than any other company had helped Sega to win vital market share from Nintendo in North America.

Trip was looking to the future though, and two things concerned him more than anything else; how he would deal with them would shape EA's future to the present day. The artists that Trip had made stars of back in the early years, let ego get in the way of business as EA moved to 16-bit. As rock stars so often leave the label that broke them, the same was true of the game designers that Trip had launched, causing inner turmoil as EA moved from one format to another. Rumours were rife about the *Strike* team and *Road Rash* creators looking to go solo, leaving behind their annual updates, while Bullfrog was falling apart under the expectations of a true world market. The public, EA and Peter Molyneux all wanted different things of Bullfrog. Also, at this time, Sega had announced a CD add-on for the Mega Drive. When Trip saw it he was so underwhelmed that EA almost didn't support it at all. Discussions with Sega about a follow-up to the Mega Drive and the news that Nintendo and Sony had parted ways over a joint console proved to Trip that the console manufacturers didn't share his visions for the future of gaming.

It was around this time that Trip sent Larry Probst, who was now CEO, and others from EA to scour the world for talent. This time they weren't looking for programmers, they were looking for companies to licence games from, and if the relationship was good and EA believed in the people then an eventual acquisition would happen. EA was never going to be held back by artists again, it would own the teams and as part of EA these companies would deliver the right game at the right time.

Undoubtedly the most significant of these new signings was Distinctive Software, bought by EA for a mere $11 million dollars in 1991; EA actually paid $785,000 and made up the balance with shares. Co-owned by Don Mattrick and Jeff Sember, Distinctive had amassed a wealth of talent and experience that saw it working for Broderbund, Mindscape and Accolade, as well as making the seminal *Hard Drivin'* for Atari. Despite the company's pedigree, Trip had other reasons for signing Distinctive. Viewing EA as a global brand, Trip was acutely aware that the world's number one sport didn't exist on the EA Sports label. After going directly to FIFA he acquired the long-term licence for international football teams, knowing that to date there wasn't a single football game from any other developer at that time that attempted realism. Nothing could

"EA, AND ITS SPORTS TITLES, MORE THAN ANY OTHER COMPANY HELPED SEGA TO WIN VITAL MARKET SHARE FROM NINTENDO IN THE US"



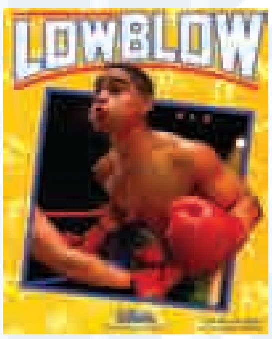






The *Need For Speed* franchise is still going strong even today, in the form of *ProStreet*.

The brilliant *Wing Commander* series was created by Origin, and was later turned into a movie that Electronic Arts helped to fund.



An EA game that hasn't remained popular.



One of EA's first Mega Drive releases.

be left to chance, EA had to get this right first time. After almost two years of development *FIFA* was released, and unusually for an EA game, the UK saw the original release. Boasting an isometric view and a more authentic feel than other games of the time it was an instant smash, *FIFA* was to football what *Madden* was to NFL. This would be Distinctive's only 16-bit title for EA, the sequels that would follow would be handled by other EA teams, while Distinctive, at Trip's bequest, started developing for an as yet unannounced new-generation 32-bit machine.

By 1992 EA had around 115 developers, internal and external. While Larry Probst would run the company, Trip steered the company into the future. It saw a 70 per cent increase in turnover after the Mega Drive deal and held the licences for *NFL*, *NBA*, *PGA* and *FIFA*. There were other sports games, of course, but none that could compete with current rosters and endorsements of governing bodies like the EA titles. EA owned sport as far as games were concerned, and when it released the multitap-adapter hardware that allowed four-player gaming for the Mega Drive EA became unassailable for the 16-bit generation. But technology never stops evolving and Trip wasn't going to sit still, he had solved the artist problem that so hamstrung EA as it left computers for consoles, but his vision of the future of gaming didn't match that of Sega and Nintendo. As equipment became more advanced, EA pursued its Hollywood model of entertainment software publishing even further, developing even more sophisticated software. In autumn 1993, EA formed its Advanced Entertainment Group, which brought together animators, musicians, photographers, writers and filmmakers. Through this venture, live actors were filmed in Hollywood sound stages, and the videotaped performances were then digitised and integrated into the software. EA also began a joint project with Colossal Pictures, creator of the MTV show *Liquid Television*. Sega and Nintendo just didn't think like this.

Dave Needle and RJ Mical previously worked on the design team of the original Amiga and on the design of the Atari Lynx. They had a new idea for a hardware platform that was proving to be difficult to fund. When Trip came across them he saw a way forward for EA and the industry without being tied to Nintendo or Sega. Trip asked Mical and Needle to rework the design slightly through their company, NTG, to align the fledgling system with Trip's view of the future of gaming. In all there would be seven partners – Matsushita, AT&T, Time Warner, MCA, Electronic Arts, venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, and the New Technologies Group (NTG) – involved in the development and marketing of the console dubbed the 3DO. The 32-bit system would allow developers a much freer development cycle. With licensing at $3 per game and no regional lockouts, Trip had created a business plan that was tailored to the needs of publishers and not hardware manufacturers. EA developed the operating system for the machine. The 3DO company was formed and Trip became chairman.

In-house, EA was working furiously on 32-bit versions of some of its bestselling titles. Origin Systems created the seminal *Wing Commander IV,* while Distinctive (now renamed EA Canada) toiled over the transition of *FIFA* and *Madden* into the world's first

EA TIMELINE 1990-1999

1990 EA BECOMES A PUBLIC COMPANY, ITS SHARES STARTED AT $8 A SHARE, BY YEAR END THEY WERE $37

EA BROKERS A FAVOURABLE LICENSING DEAL WITH SEGA

1991 EA BUYS DISTINCTIVE SOFTWARE AND TRIP HAWKINS STANDS DOWN AS CEO BUT REMAINS CHAIRMAN

1992 EA BACKS DOWN AND AGREES TO PUBLISH FIRST PARTY FOR THE NES

1993 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER IS RELEASED AND RAISES THE BAR FOR ALL FOOTBALL GAMES SINCE

1994 TRIP HAWKINS RESIGNS FROM EA TO CONCENTRATE FULL-TIME ON 3DO

1995 EA RELEASES ITS ONLY TENNIS GAME TO MUTED RESPONSE

1996 EA RELEASES FEWER GAMES THIS YEAR THAN IN ITS HISTORY, 52 IN TOTAL, AS IT LOOKS TO RE-ESTABLISH ITSELF

1997 EA BUYS MAXIS IN A MOVE THAT WOULD SEE IT ACHIEVE UNBRIDLED SUCCESS THROUGH THE FOLLOWING DECADE

1998 EA BUYS WESTWOOD STUDIOS FROM VIRGIN

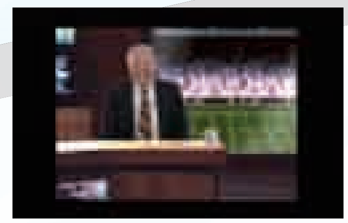
1999 EA RECALLS TIGER WOODS 99 FOR THE PSONE. IT WAS SHIPPED WITH AN EPISODE OF SOUTH PARK ON THE DISK THAT COULD BE VIEWED VIA A PC

3DO – SIX HITS



FIFA International Soccer

When *FIFA* came out on the 16-bit machines it typified the hardware it was on, shunning 3D in favour of an isometric view. Once the 3DO arrived developers could make the game they always wanted to. The presentation would become a staple of EA games, where tactics and strategies came to the fore and everything shone.



Madden NFL '94

The greatest sports game of the period. *Madden NFL '94* featured real team playbooks for the first time, incredible visuals and surround sound that made you feel like you were in the stadium. Fluid and fast, with Madden behind his sports desk giving tips throughout, this was the full package, and, in truth, the game remains the same today.



Road Rash

A massive hit on the Mega Drive, when it came to the 3DO it courted controversy, with betas allowing you to knock over pregnant women and children. At retail, however, pedestrians jump out of the way, although rumours persist of a code that regresses the game. Violent and fast, few games have come close to capturing the thrill of playing *Road Rash*.



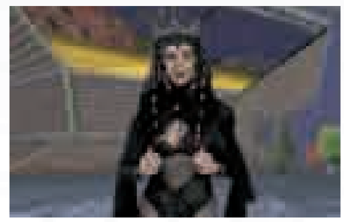
Need For Speed

The EA game with most iterations outside of the sports range. *Need For Speed* was all about the muscle cars of the day; Dodge Viper, Toyota Supra and Porsche provided the mainstay of the vehicles. Lap times were less important than avoiding the police, a real petrol-head paradise with great visuals and recorded engine sounds for the first time.



Syndicate

Arguably Bullfrog's finest, 3DO had the best version of all. The dystopian futurescape was realised with lavish attention to detail and benefited incredibly from the 3DO's Dolby setup, adding to the atmosphere and making the whole game feel more like an experience. A shame then that 3DO was dead before *Magic Carpet* flew into view.



Immercenary

Awesome. Sent forward in time, the player lands in a virtual-reality world governed by Raven (an evil Queen) and populated with Picasso-inspired characters. The invention on display here has never been bettered by EA, or anyone else come to think of it. Think *Assassin's Creed* meets *Lawnmower Man* at the Tate, and you're nearly there.

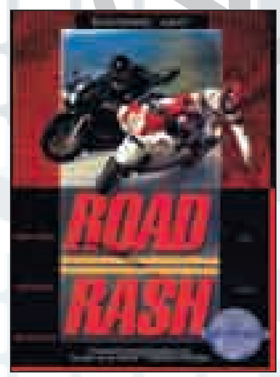
> "BOASTING AN ISOMETRIC VIEW AND A MORE AUTHENTIC FEEL IT WAS AN INSTANT HIT, FIFA WAS TO FOOTBALL WHAT MADDEN WAS TO NFL"

true 3D sports games, and partnered road and track in the development of *Need For Speed*, a game that would redefine what gamers expected from home versions of driving games, with car videos and bios alongside realistic physics. With each 3DO release EA showed just what the future of gaming held, and the presentation that has since become EA's hallmark was launched on to the masses. *Road Rash* on the 3DO, for instance, had a fully licensed soundtrack, with bands such as Therapy making up the numbers, while *FIFA* showed clips of classic World Cup games during intervals. *Madden* was the perfect game though, causing the usually dour *Edge* magazine to proclaim, "Buy yourself a copy of *John Madden* and then buy a 3DO to play it on." One of the marketing tools that the 3DO employed was that during the Super Bowl in 1994, a 3DO was set up to run a game of *Madden* to simulate the final. As coverage shifted back to the studio the sports presenters would check in to see how the game was going. In that first year, in what is now an annual ritual, the score was within ten points of the final score and the game also got the winner right.

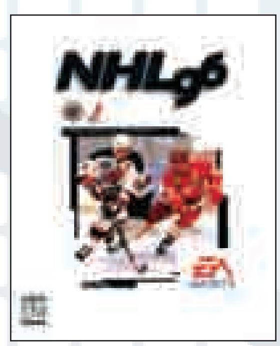
It was too little, too late for 3DO though, as lots of uncharacteristic mistakes had been made in the business model and as Sega and Sony readied their 32-bit machines for the world outside Japan, decisions had to be made and Trip had to choose between EA and 3DO. "It was a gradual accident," he says. "I intended 3DO to be a sister company and to remain involved with both, but they evolved on separate arcs and I felt obligated to keep 3DO alive. By the time it became necessary to split, it was difficult, like choosing between a healthy teenage son and a baby that was in surgery." Trip made his choice and left EA.

Larry Probst took over at the helm and quickly moved the business back to publishing and creating games for all available formats. Each 3DO title EA made had cost about $2.4 million, even *FIFA* didn't break even. 3DO had been costly to EA, but the creative endeavours had taught the company a lot about 3D and the journey had created franchises that would port well to current and future generations. To date *Need For Speed* is on its 16th instalment and has appeared on almost all formats since its inception in 1994. Short-term, 3DO was an expensive folly for EA. Long term, it had made it a pioneer of 32-bit software and CD-ROM technologies in the home.

For the rest of the Nineties, EA would continue its support of sports updates, and in 1998 it signed Tiger Woods to develop the *PGA* series further. Most of its significant new titles and franchises would be developed for the PC and Mac with weaker console conversions to follow. *Medal Of Honor* set the PC charts alight in 1999 and started the WWII FPS craze that is still with us. Support carried on for the 16 and 32-bit systems up to the final death throes of each console. The GBA proved a lucrative market for EA, allowing it to port many older titles. With the 1998 acquisition of Westwood Studios from Virgin, *Command & Conquer* joined the EA stable in time for Christmas 1999, while Origin took *Ultima Online* and EA Canada produced a string of *Warcraft* games. Gamers, by now, were feeling an apathy for EA under Probst. Despite being the company with the triple-A sports franchises and having brought Sid Meier and Molyneux to the masses, EA found it hard to find a fan base away from sports titles. EA took the *James Bond* licence from Rare in 1999 and made *Tomorrow Never Dies*. Following Rare's opus was never going to be easy, but with a third-person perspective and muted response EA had a series flop on its hands. As the Nineties came to a close, EA, that had brought so much, was in danger of eclipsing Acclaim's demise, too big to survive on sports games alone, it needed more of what had made it successful. Fortunately for Probst, it was about to find it…



Road Rash courted controversy, and so proved very popular for EA.



One of EA's most famous sports titles.

THE MAKING OF...

BERZERK

"Chicken! Fight like a robot!" To aficionados of early-Eighties gaming, those chilling words, growled in menacing metallic tones, can only mean one thing: Berzerk. Laser gun in hand, Craig Grannell tracks down creator Alan McNeil, keeping a beady eye out for Evil Otto and rampaging robots…

IN THE KNOW

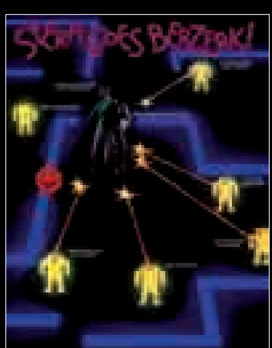
» **PUBLISHER:** STERN ELECTRONICS

» **DEVELOPER:** ALAN MCNEIL (FOR STERN ELECTRONICS)

» **RELEASED:** 1980

» **GENRE:** RUN-'N'-GUN

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £150+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET

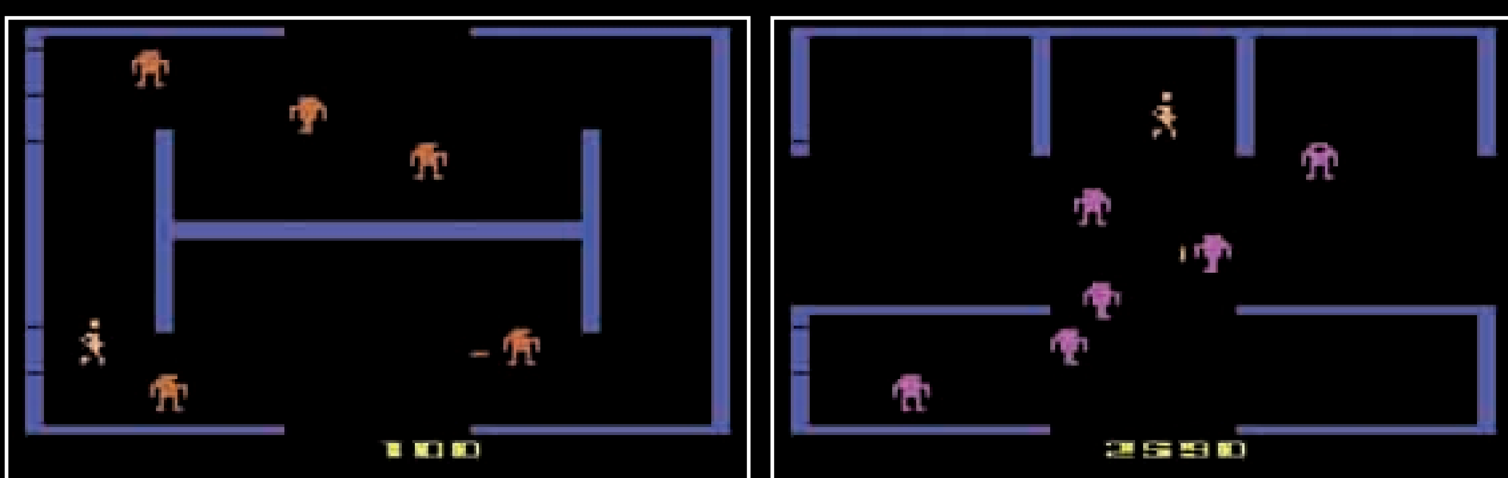


Until *Pac-Man*'s arrival on the scene, it was Stern Electronics' *Berzerk* that held US arcade gamers in thrall. Shifting over 50,000 units – a massive achievement during the embryonic market of 1980 – Alan McNeil's frenetic eight-way shooter tasked you with leading a seemingly suicidal nutcase around an endless maze full of psychotic robots, every one intent on your immediate and thorough destruction. The droids, determined to make their desires known, bark less-than-welcoming phrases such as "Destroy the intruder", "The humanoid must not escape", and, when you think better of your situation and flee through a room's handy exit, the charming "Chicken! Fight like a robot!" Along with this breakthrough audio – one of the earliest examples of speech synthesis in arcade games – *Berserk* offered other ground-breaking elements, including rudimentary artificial intelligence, with your robot enemies often making errors (something players can use to their advantage, 'encouraging' the droids to destroy each other), and it also arguably heavily influenced *Robotron: 2084*, which in turn led to the likes of *Smash TV* and *Geometry Wars* – a strong lineage indeed.

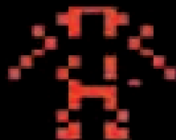
Alan was seemingly fated to end up working on videogames in some form. He notes that he always liked games – playing lots of Mille Bornes and Stratego when younger – but when he was at college, he suddenly found himself surrounded by then cutting-edge equipment. "PLATO – a network of amazing graphical computer terminals for computer-aided education – came to campus," he recalls. "Because of the size of the network – about 1,000 terminals across the USA – it was the perfect platform to develop the first network games." Alan remembers chatrooms and forums being born well before the internet's arrival, and crude but fun games being fashioned, enabling you to play online dogfights, "blasting someone out of the sky who was playing in a different state."

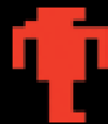
Once in the field of employment, Alan soon found himself at Bally/Midway-owned Dave Nutting Associates, a group that had already created the arcade games *Gunfight* and *Seawolf*. He worked on sequels to both titles, along with Bally Arcade ("the console that should have beaten Atari, but Midway couldn't build them without zapping the main chip with static, so most units were dead at the end of the assembly line…"), and when it became obvious to Alan that he'd "be working on arcade games forever," he asked Dave Nutting if he could design his own game. Turned down, due to a lack of experience, and annoyed at being told he wasn't good enough to do something, Alan began scouring the job ads.

"I already had some primitive games by other people running on my Sol20 [Terminal Computer], including a version



» [Atari 2600] Although generally well regarded by gamers, Alan's not keen on the Atari 2600 *Berzerk* conversion, and says it lacks many of his gameplay refinements.









» *Berzerk*'s original multi-coloured side-panel art (above right) was dropped, because it wasn't smooth-edged, thereby making decal application harder. It was replaced by a spray-paint stencil, as used on the depicted cabinet (above left).

of *Robots* (see 'We Are The Robots' boxout)," says Alan. "*Robots* was clunky, but I thought a smooth-running 'dodge the robots that are trying to kill you' game would be cool." Before long, Alan found an opening – a subsidiary of Stern Electronics required a pinball programmer to work on hardware changes for a licensed Bally controller board. "I asked if I could do a videogame after I fixed the pinball problem, and they said yes," says Alan, who then rapidly got a prototype hooked up to his Tektronix development system.

Perhaps due to too many late-night sessions with *Robots*, Alan says he had a dream of a black-and-white videogame with a stick man and numerous robots closing in on him, "It was just a second's worth of action, but this was exactly what I made for the first pass of my game." Graphically, the shifty-eyed robots owed something to *Battlestar Galactica*'s Cylons; and in terms of gameplay, the initial version was like an extremely intense real-time version of *Robots*. "It was too hard, even with just six robots," says Alan. "The game favoured the robots too much – they would crash into each other occasionally, but the average game time on one life was about six seconds – not good."

Although such rapid turnaround would perhaps please coin operators, Alan's rule of thumb was to take the price of a movie ticket and divide it into pennies per minute, in order to figure out the game time you should expect for a quarter, "Back then, this was between three and five minutes, and so my goal was to enable beginners to last three minutes." Help was required to beat the robots, and so the protagonist was armed with laser bolts, but still the robots changed paths too rapidly and came at the player from too many directions. Bouncing the player's laser fire around the screen didn't help either, since you then had to avoid your own shots and the psychotic robots.

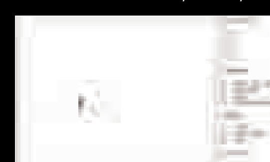
The key to *Berzerk*, and something that set it apart from *Robots*, was the addition of barriers. Alan devised a simple scheme for generating mazes. Solid walls, each with a door, were placed on each edge of every room. The remaining space was divided into tiles, and a 'support column' placed at every tile intersection that wasn't embedded in a wall. A wall was attached to each 'column', and spun in a random direction. "This mostly resulted in nice maze-like rooms, although sometimes you get a two-by-one box in the middle, and with a robot being placed on every tile, there are sometimes two robots stuck in that space," says Alan.

To stop the maze from being entirely random, Alan used the x/y co-ordinates of a room as a 16-bit number to seed the generator. "Because of this, you can exit a room, return to it later and see the same room," explains Alan. "It makes the universe more real if you leave somewhere and return to an identical

"IT WAS TOO HARD, EVEN WITH JUST SIX ROBOTS. THE GAME FAVOURED THE ROBOTS TOO MUCH – THEY WOULD CRASH INTO EACH OTHER OCCASIONALLY, BUT THE AVERAGE GAME TIME ON ONE LIFE WAS ABOUT SIX SECONDS – NOT GOOD" ALAN ON THE FIRST PASS OF BERZERK

WE ARE THE ROBOTS!

Even arcade games from the early Eighties had their influences, despite there being few gaming references to draw on, and *Berzerk* was no exception. For Alan, his main influence was a game in BASIC called *Robots* that he recalls first seeing in an issue of *Byte* magazine. "I played it a lot on my Altair. There was a plus sign, which was 'you', and a bunch of Os, which were hunter robots," explains Alan. "You typed in your move as a compass direction and then the screen refreshed, during which time the robots all moved towards you on the shortest path possible, using only the eight compass directions." The main element Alan borrowed was the robots vanishing when they crashed into each other, "I carried that concept of vicious robots that were so single-minded about killing you that they didn't watch out for each other. I'd also read all the Fred Saberhagen *Berserker* stories, and so the game's title is homage to his excellent work." Although superseded by its arcade descendants, *Robots* has nonetheless found its way on to countless platforms, often as a version called *Daleks*. Check out an online version at www.koobifora.com/daleks/.





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

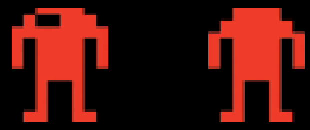
SEA WOLF II
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1978

METEOR
SYSTEM: PINBALL
YEAR: 1979

FRENZY (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, C64
YEAR: 1982

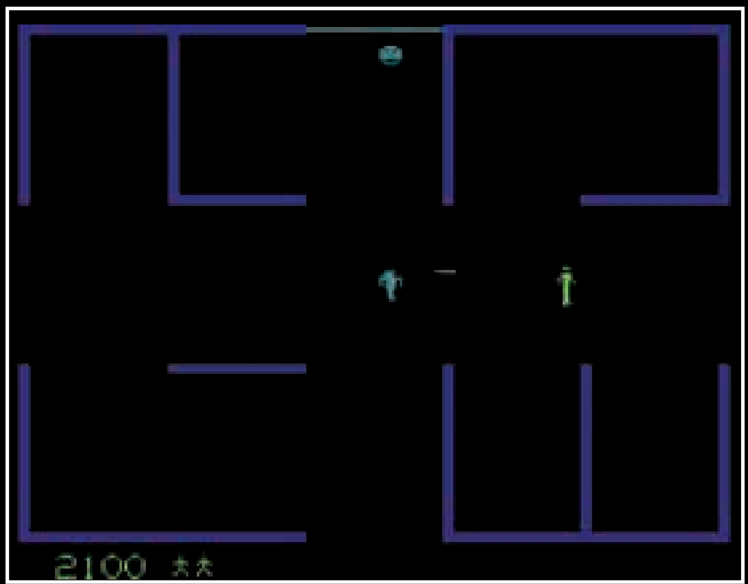


BERZERK





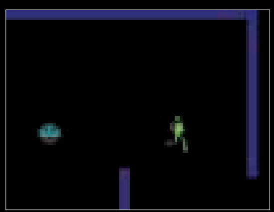
» [Arcade] Looking at the centre of the room, our hero mused that life would be much easier if all his foes were blocked in.



» [Arcade] With Evil Otto advancing, our hero considers survival worthwhile, even if he'll be taunted as a 'chicken'.

HAVE A NICE DAY!

Evil Otto – the indestructible, lethal smiley face – arose from two of Alan's pet hates. "1980 was the era of the smiley – that obnoxious yellow circle with dots for eyes, an arc for a smile, and 'have a nice day' below," remembers Alan. "I despised it, and associated it with people who didn't want you to have a nice day, but instead wanted to cover themselves in fake righteousness. So I showed it like it was: 'have a nice day while I beat you to death!' I made the smiley come straight for you while bouncing like a yellow ball. It added a dash of bitter sarcasm to the game." The name was a pun on Evil Auto(-matic push-you-on device), and a reference to Dave Nutting Associates' security manager Mr Otto. "He decided engineers and programmers should take lunch from exactly noon until 1pm, forcing us to drop everything and head out for lunch exactly on time," recalls Alan. "He then locked the doors until 1pm. Naturally, this annoyed us when we arrived back early and couldn't get in, and so we started having longer lunches. Within a week, the main boss made Otto give up his plan, but this was only one of Otto's 'guilty until proven innocent' moves, and so the ball got named Evil Otto."



layout. Totally random rooms aren't immersive – your brain goes 'huh?' – and a robot would be able to shoot you from a place where it couldn't be before, and you'd get angry at the game."

Despite these improvements, Alan still considered *Berzerk* flawed, "It was smooth and fun, but the robots would all open fire at once, and were deadly accurate. Also, there were robots stuck in the centre sections that you couldn't shoot, and there was no incentive for players to move on once a room's robots were eliminated." Due to using the *Robots* device of destroying enemies that collided with each other, Alan decided the real problem with stuck robots was if there was just one of them – with two, you could at least manipulate them into blowing each other up. Enter Evil Otto. This psychotic bouncing face (see the 'Have A Nice Day!' boxout for more on his origins) appears if you spend too long in a room, coming straight for you (thereby removing the 'hanging around' issue), but with the positive side effect of potentially stomping inaccessible robots in his quest to smash you.

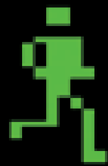
By this point, the game was largely the *Berzerk* we know today – at least in terms of basic gameplay. Subsequent changes first involved adding bullet progression, over time gradually upping the number of robot bullets available. "I made the game keep track of the rooms you left after killing robots, and used that count to drive the number of robots' bullets," explains Alan. "It made it seem like the robots were going from peeved to angry to berserk with rage." Various settings were tried and tested with players of varying ability, in order to get the balance right and to achieve Alan's target of a (minimum) three-minute game for beginners.

The robots' movement was also amended; with their speed being increased as the levels progressed, and said speed being matched with the animation of the robots. "I didn't want to see any feet sliding along the ground – after all, I got my degree in design partially by doing seven minutes of animation," jokes Alan. On a more serious note, he explains, "To get someone immersed in a game, there cannot be cognitive dissonance – no 'that doesn't seem right' moments. Therefore, 'glide walking' was scrapped, and I ensured that although the robots on the early levels spin their eyes slowly, the ones on the later levels spin like the enraged enemies they are."

> "IT MAKES THE UNIVERSE MORE REAL IF YOU LEAVE SOMEWHERE AND RETURN TO AN IDENTICAL LAYOUT. TOTALLY RANDOM ROOMS AREN'T IMMERSIVE – YOUR BRAIN GOES 'HUH?'" ALAN ON MAKING THE MAZE NON-RANDOM



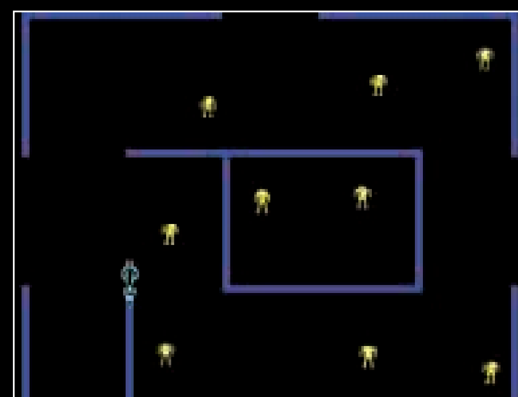
» [Atari 2600] Despite lacking some of its arcade parent's features, the Atari conversion nonetheless retains the bow-tie trick.





» [Arcade] To add insult to injury, the dying player managed to clash badly with the rest of the game's decor.

"I MADE THE GAME KEEP TRACK OF THE ROOMS YOU LEFT AFTER KILLING ROBOTS, AND USED THAT COUNT TO DRIVE THE NUMBER OF ROBOTS' BULLETS. IT MADE IT SEEM LIKE THE ROBOTS WERE GOING FROM PEEVED TO ANGRY TO BERSERK WITH RAGE" ALAN ON ADDING PROGRESSION TO HIS GAME



» [Arcade] Look Frank we've generated inside a bloody big rectangle. How do we kill the human now ?.

To further assist players, the registration points of the art were amended. "Games track by x/y points – the registration point is where the '0,0' point of an object is," explains Alan. "I tweaked the robots so that their shooting was just barely good enough to hit you. This enabled you to dodge bolts if you were careful." The exception to this rule was when a robot was coming right at you from the left or right. However, the design of the main sprite has a small gap between the head and body, which led to seasoned players inventing and taking advantage of the 'bulletproof bow-tie' trick. "When you run, the man's body moves up and down, but during testing we had one amazing player that could stop for just long enough to let the bolt pass through his neck and then move on – while fighting at the highest level," recalls Alan. "He practised kung fu and consistently got high scores!"

Despite all of the fine-tuning that went into *Berzerk*'s gameplay, it was another element added during development that proved one of the game's most memorable components: speech. While frantically battling for your life, your metal-clad adversaries continually bark threats and warnings, and insult you should you decide to run rather than stand and fight. Alan notes that the game originally had pinball-type sounds – one or two counters connected to an amplifier. "If you put in a small number, it would make a high-pitch square wave. A big number would take longer to count down to zero, and so the resulting sound would be lower in tone," he says. Apparently, this system was so basic that it was just about impossible to even craft a simple tune with it, but as Alan



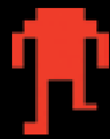


» [Arcade] On reflection, our hero thought that his jogging route was a little on the dangerous side…



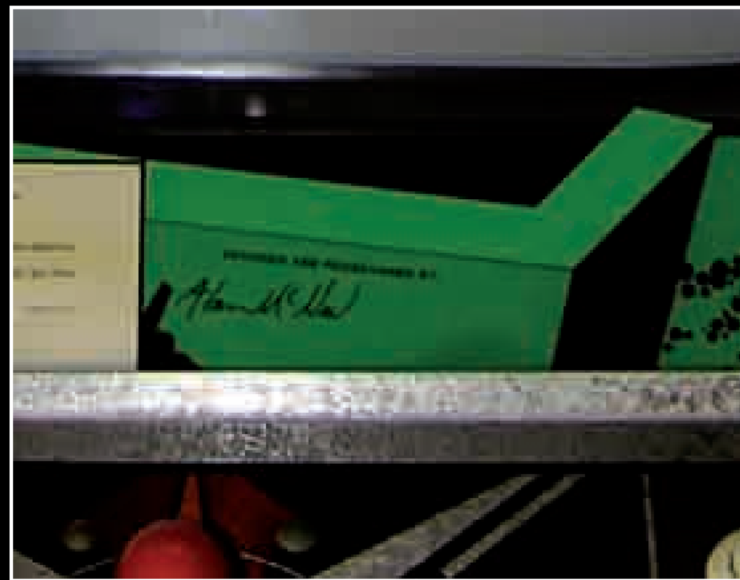
» The *Berzerk* cab in all its glory, with the wee Wico joystick, to stop gamers flattening themselves by pulling the cabinet over.

BERZERK





» [Arcade] It's brown trousers time as our hero finds himself surrounded by hostile robots and a distinct lack of any refuge.



» Alan reckons he was the first person to sign an arcade game, "The cab says "Designed and programmed by", followed by my signature. Coming from an art background, I figured work should be signed. Getting royalties may have been a better idea…"



and the company had used the scheme in pinball for a year, he already had a number of 'zappy' and 'tweepy' sounds in his program library.

Things all changed when a salesman visited during *Berzerk*'s development, and tried to hawk a 'speech chip' that was actually intended to assist blind people. "They were hoping to try to get it into toys and games, and it sounded very robotic," says Alan, noting that it was limited to about 20 fixed words of vocabulary. He continues, "The chip used custom hardware to make hisses and tones that assembled into words. All the computer could control was the word and the pitch."

For Alan, the potential was in being able to order the chips with any set of words, as long as they'd fit on the tiny available chip size. In large quantities, the price became less of an issue, and when Alan's boss asked if he'd be able to use the system in his game, there was no holding him back. "I was on it right away," he confirms. "The interface was simple – feed it a number that indexed the word, and a pitch number, and then wait until the busy talking bit cleared."

The trick in making the system a success, according to Alan, was in getting more sentences out of it: he made it sound as if the robots were hunting the player. "I wrote up a bunch of sentences, but then decided the best result for the small number of words would be to use the construction: '[killing-verb] the [player-noun]'," he explains. With the help of a suitably large thesaurus, various synonyms of 'destroy' were jotted down, and combined with ways of describing the player. "Player nouns weren't as obvious, and so I had to imagine the various ways in which robots might describe the player: 'intruder' and 'human' came to mind right away," recalls Alan.

One of the more surprising exclamations from your metal foes in *Berzerk* is the rather colloquial insult of 'chicken'. Sometimes used in constructions such as "Kill the chicken", its most memorable occurrence is when a player scarpers from a room without destroying all the robots, whereupon one of the survivors bellows, "Chicken! Fight like a robot!"

The somewhat strange addition of 'chicken' as a player noun came about during playtesting. Alan remembers how one of the engineers would play the game and run through the various rooms, without shooting any robots. Just for him, the word 'chicken' was added. "Any time you left live robots in the previous room, the next room's robots would taunt you with "Kill the chicken" and "Destroy the chicken"," laughs Alan. "It was quite enjoyable to see the 'chicken' taunt annoying him and other players."

With the robot threats and taunts assembled, Alan discovered that he still had space for a few words on the chip. Deciding to make use of this, he thought about enhancing *Berzerk*'s attract mode, which by this point had been fashioned into a rolling demo and high-score table. "After some thought, I added the phrase "Coin detected in pocket", which was intended to encourage replay," he says. "One bar patron actually asked me how the game knew that he still had some quarters – and he played until he didn't have quarters, to find out! I was surprised how many people thought there was some kind of special coin detector in the cabinet."

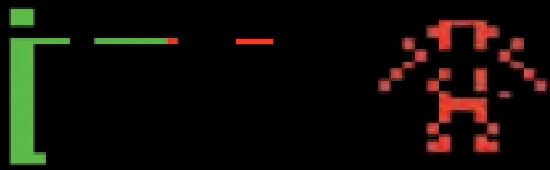
A final major change to the game involved the introduction of colour, motivated by a game released during *Berzerk*'s development that used coloured, transparent ink printed on a black-and-white tube to make the game look like it was in colour. "I don't remember what game this was, but my bosses were freaking out," says Alan. "They thought that *Berzerk* – which was



"WHEN YOU RUN, THE MAN'S BODY MOVES UP AND DOWN, BUT DURING TESTING WE HAD ONE AMAZING PLAYER THAT COULD STOP FOR JUST LONG ENOUGH TO LET THE BOLT PASS THROUGH HIS NECK AND THEN MOVE ON" ALAN ON DISCOVERING THE BOW-TIE TRICK



» [Arcade] It's possible to get the robots to shoot themselves if you get the timing right. Stupid robots.



"ANY TIME YOU LEFT LIVE ROBOTS IN THE PREVIOUS ROOM, THE NEXT ROOM'S ROBOTS WOULD TAUNT YOU WITH "KILL THE CHICKEN" AND "DESTROY THE CHICKEN". IT WAS QUITE ENJOYABLE TO SEE THE 'CHICKEN' TAUNT ANNOYING PLAYERS" ALAN ON BERZERK'S MOST MEMORABLE PHRASE

black and white at the time – couldn't compete without colour."

The problem facing the team was that there was no way to afford a new set of hardware. Other engineers got busy while Alan lived in dread of the changes. He'd have liked to have designed with colour right from the start, rather than shoehorning it in during the final month of production, and describes the final result as 'odd'. "The engineers made a 'colour overlay' video layer, but this was at a much cruder resolution than the screen," explains Alan. "Each colour chip covered a four-by-four area of the black-and-white pixels, and each tile had four bits for colour: R, G, B, and dim."

The result was a bright green player, with blue surrounding walls, and robots that changed colour as you progressed through the game. But Alan wasn't convinced. Calling the result "kludge kolor", he was irked with how when the player got within four pixels of a robot, some of the robot's colour would go green. "Still, you were usually dead before you could notice, and at least the tiles were the same size as the thickness of the walls," comments Alan.

Despite a few compromises being made, mostly on the basis of cost, it's fair to say that *Berzerk* largely met Alan's original vision. Its combination of frantic gameplay, ground-breaking audio, and wanton destruction resulted in an extremely favourable response. Stern Electronics was soon running multiple shifts, in order to get enough units out to meet demand. "The game did so well because operators loved it for its repeat-play draw and lasting power," explains Alan. "Some games would be played out in a month, because kids would get easily bored with them, but they always came back to *Berzerk*. *Pac-Man* eventually spelled the end of *Berzerk*'s dominance, but even then it was earning well for operators."

The game's success meant home versions soon followed for Atari consoles and for the Vectrex, although Alan's memories of these iterations are far from fond, "I had nothing to do with them. The first I heard of the deal was through a boss who said Stern Electronics had sold the rights to make the home game to Atari for 4 million dollars – intellectual property capitalism at its finest. My salary at the time was $30,000… And the conversions didn't play well, because they didn't have the right values for all the tweaks I made, and they looked cruder."

However, of his own creation, he's rightly proud, and despite the frustrations that were involved, he even considers the original, limited hardware an important component of his game's eventual success. "Constraints are good for design – every game doesn't need super-realistic 3D rendering to be fun," he concludes. And when it comes to a classic like *Berzerk*, we can only agree.

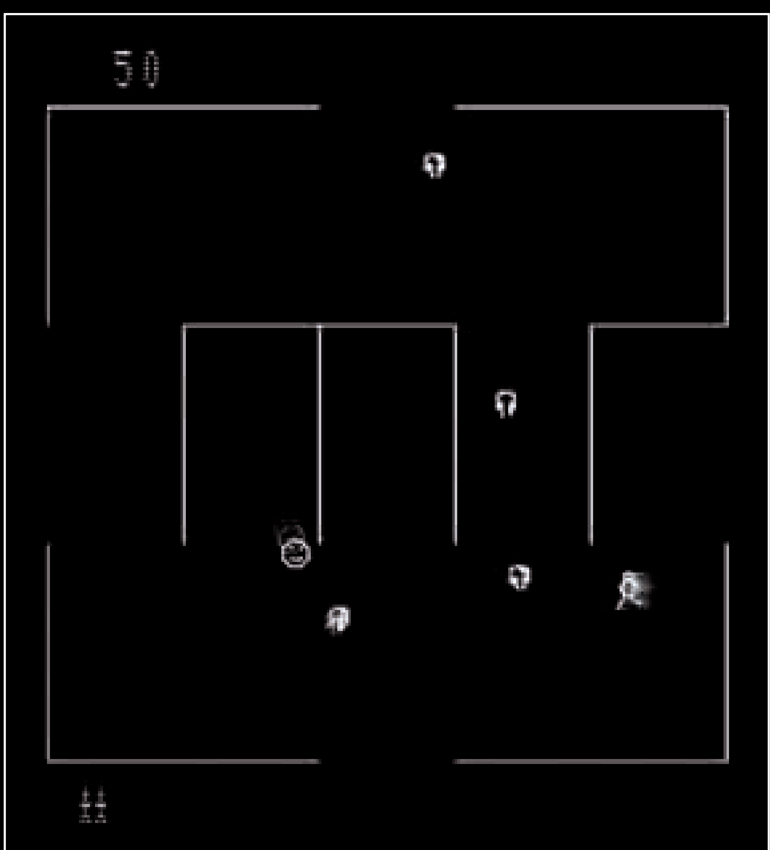


» [Arcade] Blue robots fire extremely quickly and can often catch you flat-footed. Keep you wits about you at all times.

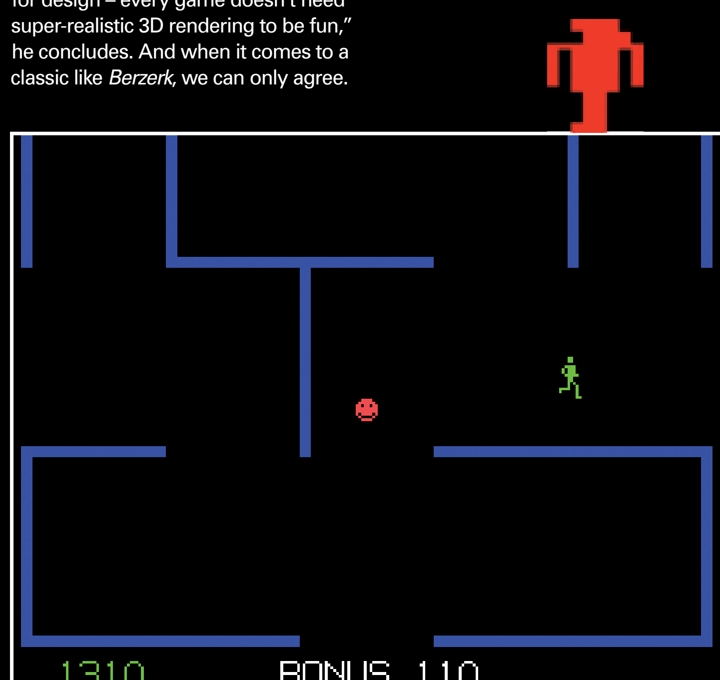
KILL THE HUMANOID!

Berserk proved to be violent off-screen as well as on. Early test models had large joysticks, which had to be replaced by a standard one-inch-high Wico model. "We had to change the joystick during production because some players would pull so hard in the down direction that they would tip the cabinet on to themselves," jokes Alan, who adds that he missed the bigger stick, "Your grip is more solid on a stick you can get your fist around. The little joystick needed a fingertip hold – pretty namby-pamby for someone escaping from millions of enraged robots. Oh well – we couldn't have any players dying as pancakes." But one player did die while playing the game. (Alan refutes reports that claim two died.) "The unfortunate fellow was obese and had run upstairs to play the game," Alan explains. "The legend is he set a high score and died, but the owner of the arcade said he didn't finish the game – he was out of breath from the moment he arrived until he dropped. The legend is way better than reality: the excitement of playing a game killing a player after setting a high score…"

THANKS TO Steve MacDonald (www.vaps.org/members/member_detail.php?member_id=392050) for the *Berzerk* cabinet images, and to Andrew Dean for the *Robots* grab.



» [Vectrex] This version of *Berzerk* plays surprisingly well, with Evil Otto managing to look even more menacing than usual. Grrr!



» [Arcade] Destroy all the robots and you'll get yourself a nice bonus. Just make sure Otto doesn't catch you.

SCRAMBLE

LET HIGH-SCORE GETTER AND MARATHON MAN ROBERT MRUCZEK HELP YOU INFILTRATE EVER DEEPER INTO KONAMI'S CLASSIC SHOOTER

Created by Konami at the tail end of 1980, *Scramble* set the template for the horizontal-scrolling shoot-'em-up genre and flummoxed many a gamer before they eventually worked out how to negotiate the fifth of its six levels. The 'maze' section required mastering the then-unique manoeuvre of pushing your ship as far forward as possible and then tugging your joystick back and up or down. Tricky, but very satisfying.

The game was licensed to Stern for distribution in the US and it immediately took its name to heart by dramatically increasing the speed of your fuel consumption, making the game a much tougher proposition.

Scramble spawned a direct sequel in the form of *Super Cobra*, but can also claim to be the first born of the mighty *Gradius* dynasty (see The Definitive Guide in **RG** 24 for more). It has its place in legal history too, after Omni Video Games produced its own virtually identical version of the game. A landmark case in 1982 ruled that the 'sights and sounds' of a game could be copyrighted, even if they were produced using different source code, so ending the widespread trade in 'knock-offs'. Well, it was a start…

THE EXPERT

"Playing a single credit for 100 hours is a goal," states Robert Mruczek, boldly. "Over the last few years, I've had stretches of doing nothing but playing games for three whole days straight and I know I can keep my semblance of thought together for 85 hours. That last 15 hours will be tough, but I'm planning to play until I pass out."



» The *Scramble* cabinet with its very lovely side art.

Gaming has always been in Robert's blood. In the late Sixties, at the tender age of five, he was frequenting amusement parks near to Brooklyn, New York, the place he still calls home, and a few years later he was beating adults at *Pong* in his local Sears store. By the early Eighties, he was notching up impressive tallies on many a classic, including 330,000 on the Stern version of *Scramble*, but it was his 300,000,000 score on *Star Wars* that has really stood the test of time.

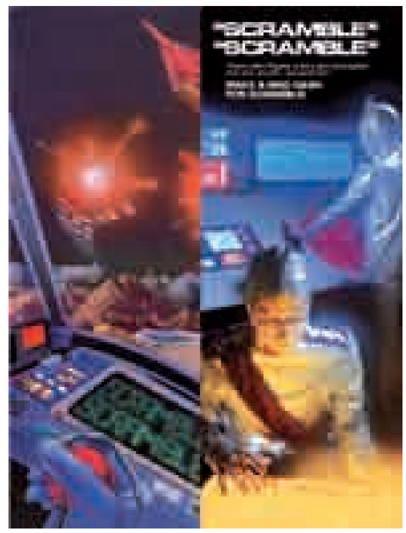
"With videogames, I'd finally found something that I was good at," chuckles Robert. "That *Star Wars* marathon took me 49 hours, but I was 20 in 1984 and I knew how to pace myself. A guy called Brandon Erikson has actually played it for 54 hours and came within 15 million of my record, but he started to hallucinate. He told me the towers became like media people throwing microphones in his face."

As the arcade industry gradually declined, Robert switched his attention to console gaming and on discovering Twin Galaxies' *Official Video Game And Pinball Book Of World Records* in 1997, he began submitting his scores. By 2001, they numbered in the hundreds and he was asked to join the team.

"I became TG's chief referee," explains Robert. "I watched over 1,500 tapes of gaming performances. How? I basically got two hours sleep a night for five-and-a-half years."

He immersed himself in the high-score community, diligently verifying the achievements of others, while still finding enough time to work on his own game. Thanks to a helpful tip from Dwayne Richards, at the annual Funspot Tournament in 2002, he posted a mammoth 1,100,000 on *Scramble*.

"Dwayne had realised that in the City Stage on the Konami version, once a rocket launches, another one can't launch until three positions later and knowing that is crucial in tight situations," Robert gratefully acknowledges. "On virtually my next game, my score went into the stratosphere."



» The wonderful arcade flyer. Hug a hoodie.

Robert parted company with Twin Galaxies in 2006, unhappy with its business direction and tolerance of "wacko nut job Roy Schildt", as he diplomatically puts it, the perpetual thorn in the organisation's side. Free from the exhausting demands of his role there, it's meant Robert can concentrate on preparation for that 100-hour Holy Grail.

"Actually, I do have an advantage," he reveals. "I have a third kidney, which means I metabolise my liquids very quickly. I sweat them out. I didn't have to urinate when I did my *Star Wars* marathon, but you have to keep yourself minimally hydrated to stop the toxins building up. In the days leading up to the game, you need to avoid hamburgers, Gummi Bears, pork rinds or any greasy foods that will cause you to do things that, to put it bluntly, you just don't have time for."

He ponders the imperative of bodily functions for a moment. "You know, if I'm going to play for four days without a break, then I think I'll get some privacy screens," he

HIGH SCORE NEWS

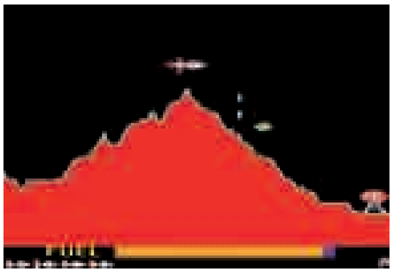
The *King Of Kong* documentary chronicling the battle between Steve Wiebe and Billy Mitchell for the *Donkey Kong* crown continues to cause controversy. The immaculately coiffured Mitchell is cast as the villain of the piece and now appears to have spoiled the film's happy ending by submitting a swiftly verified videotape of him clocking a whopping 1,050,200, putting him back on the throne…

Tetris number two, James Clewett, attempted to break the arcade World Record at the Broadway cinema in Nottingham last October. Despite scoring over 2,000,000 in practice and with **Retro Gamer** urging him on, he fell short of the current high of 1,600,000. His huge disappointment was tempered though by having Alexey Pajitnov watch his game. The *Tetris* creator stroked his beard, nodded approvingly at James's skills and even signed his Game Boy…

They might not make 'em like they used to, but they certainly still play 'em and in November last year, the *Depth Charge* World Record that had stood for an unprecedented 30 years finally fell. Martin Bedard set a new high score of 4,800 at Funspot in New Hampshire, the arcade that the previous record holder John Lawton co-founded back in the Fifties. Sweet…



» Robert doing his 'games guru' cameo in the *King Of Kong* documentary.


» **1** Double bombing over ridges. That fuel tank is going to blow…


» **1a** Get into the rhythm of those bouncing saucers.


» **2** Perfect your ridge-hopping.


» **3** Learn when those rockets are going to launch


» **4** Relax, you can sit on those tanks.

wisely concludes. Marathon gaming isn't always pretty…

THE KNOWLEDGE

Memorise the layout of each stage, especially the location of fuel tanks. Fuel consumption reaches its maximum speed at Level 3 and in the Stern version, this can mean you can't afford to miss a single tank, though it's actually possible for a fuel tank to be missing from its expected location. Memorise the arc of the bomb and learn how to 'double bomb', especially over ridges. Learn the limits of the game's collision detection, particularly at the bottom of your ship. It is possible to virtually 'sit' on a target and not be destroyed.

Stage 1 is easy, provided you effectively bomb over ridges. For Stage 2, position your ship a little over the highest ridge, bomb accurately, then dive over the ridges. Get into the rhythm of taking out each saucer as it reaches the bottom of its arc. For Stage 3, 'hop' your ship over a ridge when an opening presents itself. Accelerate forwards up to the next ridge so that if an opening comes up you can quickly hop over, or pull back until the opportunity presents itself, but be careful as this leaves you far less reaction time to dodge the incoming fireballs. Do not miss that last fuel tank. In Stage 4, the rockets both launch and randomly 'shift' position one width to their right. The hardest part is the top of each ridge and the long stretch of silos in the middle of the stage. The last ship in the stage rarely launches, but can. Negotiating the final two stages is the same regardless of what level you are on. To destroy the base, keep your ship pressed forward and execute the final manoeuvre as follows: the instant the tail end of your ship clears the tall building before the base, push the joystick down and keep doing so, then the instant the tail end of your ship clears the smaller building, pull straight down/back, just as you would in the maze, until your ship's nose is eye to eye with the base. Shoot *and* bomb at this point. It is irrelevant if your ship survives an impact that follows, and in later levels impact is unavoidable. Whether playing Konami or Stern, you will have enough fuel to make it through the maze and also to bomb the base, so do *not* panic!

For advanced players, practice sitting the tail end of your ship on a target and then pressing bomb to destroy it, though in Stage 4, be very wary of any rocket to the immediate left of the target as it may shift unexpectedly. Remember in the Konami version, during the City stage, once a ship has launched, the next two will not launch. Use this information strategically. For a real challenge, try to destroy every target in a level, which is difficult but not impossible. Then see how high you can score using bombs only. It's possible to get to Level 3, though I don't think any further. The 'flags' stop being awarded when they reach 48 and start again at Stage 255, though if you can get that far, your score should be around 6,000,000!


» Robert having a crack at another of his favourites…


» Serious gamers squint in daylight. Robert outside the Funspot arcade, flanked by Brian 'The Dove' Kuh and Tom 'Mario Bros' Votava.

WE ARE NOT WORTHY


» Tony Temple and Todd Rogers. Robert reckons they can play a bit.

Having watched an eye-squaring 6,000 hours of gaming footage during his time at Twin Galaxies, we asked Robert to name his top-five videogaming performances of all-time. "Number one is Phil Britt's Grand Slam score of over 1,000,000 on *Paperboy*, which I doubt anyone will even get close to. Then two from Todd Rogers – his 5.51 seconds on *Dragster*, which is the only time a player has beaten a computer specifically designed to play a game, and his 85-hour game on *Journey Escape* for the VCS. That's virtually unparalleled – so far! Next is Donald Hayes' 10,000,000 on *Millipede* and I know he can do even better. And finally, I had the thrill of watching one of your countrymen, Tony Temple, shred the *Missile Command* tournament record, taking the game to a level I didn't think possible. I spent $325 on a PAL VCR to watch his performance and his expertise dwarfed anything I'd seen before."

WILL WRIGHT



THE SIMPSONS MAY HAVE DUBBED HIM 'THE NERDIEST NERD IN THE ENTIRE COMPUTERVERSE', BUT WILL WRIGHT ISN'T YOUR TYPICAL GEEK – HE LOVES A GOOD FIGHT. IF A GAME CONCEPT DOESN'T FACE SOME KIND OF PANICKY HESITANCE BY A TABLE OF APPREHENSIVE SUITS, A LITTLE PIECE OF THAT IDEA DIES INSIDE HIM. STUART INVITES WILL ROUND FOR A SIM SANDWICH...

Will Wright thinks outside the box. We know it's a hackneyed phrase that's been coined so often you can't even type the words without feeling uninspired, but there is simply no better idiom to exemplify the achievements of this man. The prolific designer changed the way many view games, pulling pixels away from irreverent subjects and plonking them into everyday scenarios. This workman-like approach to game design has earned Wright a place in the prestigious Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame, alongside friend and fellow industry great Shigeru Myamoto. He sees the accolade as a huge honour and a giant step for the industry. His social simulator *The Sims* would also knock the spellbinding PC classic *Myst* off the top spot to be crowned Greatest PC Game Of All Time.

Like all great practitioners, Will was an enthusiast of literature and a gifted obsessive, a guy that would approach interests and hobbies with compulsive furore. Feverously investing the time to understand every microscopic detail there was about the subjects that fascinated him. It's no surprise then, when you consider the archetype game that he's most synonymous with, that the one area that continually sparked his curiosity was construction.



» *Sim Farm* is one of the Will's lesser-known *Sims*, although it looks more 'Sim Allotment' in our opinion.

"I spent most of my childhood building models and obsessively researching various subjects that I found interesting, such as 20th Century history, Houdini, insects, airships, astronomy, and explosives. I would usually get very obsessed with some subject or area of interest for six months or a year, and just learn everything about it. I've always liked studying different things. That's one reason why I really like doing game design. It gives me an excuse to go out and research these wildly different things for a year or two and then move onto the next thing later."

After leaving school, having studied architecture and mechanical engineering, Will's pragmatic nature, talents and love for space would stand him in good stead for a career in game development. He discovered a keen interest in robotic engineering, which would prove the catalyst for his eventual career in games when, after purchasing an Apple II home computer to hook up to one of his mechanical creations, Will inevitably discovered a new subject to learn and master: programming.

Raid On Bungeling Bay for C64 was Will's first 'proper' foray into programming. *Raid* was an overhead helicopter blaster that saw gamers dropping bombs over enemy installations. Its look shares a certain semblance with Will's second and most revered game, *SimCity*, the idea for which, incidentally, came to him during *Raid*'s development when he realised he was having more fun designing its levels than playing the finished game.

"I was fascinated by bringing a city to life. I wanted to add more behaviour to it. I wanted to add traffic and see the world kind of come alive and be more dynamic. At first I just wanted to do a traffic simulation, but then I realised that traffic didn't make a lot of sense unless you had places where the people drove to… and that led, layer upon layer, to a whole city – *SimCity*," muses Will.

There are areas of *Raid*'s gameplay that show evidence of the *SimCity* ethos. Players would receive intelligence reports and, over the course of the game, the enemy factories ripen, causing headaches if not obliterated quickly. This idea of sprites growing and developing is a significant aspect in all of Will's videogames.

The legion of *Sims* games that followed would find that their sporadic themes echo their commercial acclaim, but were there any *Sims* titles that fell to the cutting-room floor, perhaps deemed technically impractical? "There were lots, such as *Sim Sewer* and *Sim Storm*, recalls Will. "One thing that I've always wanted to do is a tactical weather simulation, and by tactical I mean really zoomed-in on the intricate nature of a thundercloud, the way tornadoes form, gust fronts, and so on. If you could visualise the whole thing in three dimensions, I think it would be a fascinating game. It's very much an interface challenge though. I actually did some experiments for a while, pursuing this idea. How you would simulate a thunderstorm and how you would visualise the different layers inside it. That's one of those ideas I haven't quite figured out yet."

The Sims wrecking ball was set in motion in 1985, with the release of *SimCity* on C64. The game, originally entitled *Micropolis*, would be a first of its kind, a game that could be neither won nor lost, a 'passive RTS' for want of a better description. It would earn itself the nickname 'software toy' owing to its lack of clear objectives. Giving the player free creative rein over a patch of unsullied land, they had to erect edifices and sustain a thriving and bustling city. *Raid*'s problematic headaches would make a re-appearance in the inspired and potent form of Mother Nature, who would send natural disasters, such as fires and tornadoes, to haphazardly afflict your city.

"I like the fact that the player is put in the creative role and the game really becomes an amplifier on their imagination," Will says. He also took inspiration from short story *The Seventh Sally*, written by Stanislaw Lem,

IN THE KNOW

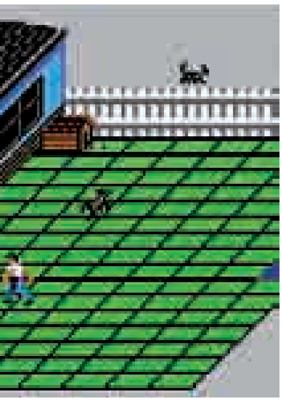
IN BRIEF...

Pulling games away from fictional subjects and supplanting them inside everyday situations, Will's salient programming efforts became renowned for being built around rules and environments. His distinctive vision eventually found a catalyst with the formation of his company Maxis, a partnership with investor Jeff Braun. Under the Maxis banner, Will produced a slew of simulation-type games. In 1997, Maxis was acquired by EA, and it was then that Will produced *The Sims*, his most successful title to date. His next audacious project is evolution simulator *Spore*.

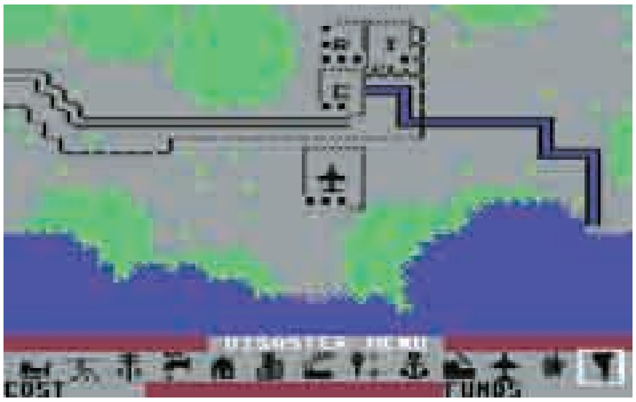




"I WAS FASCINATED BY BRINGING A CITY TO LIFE. I WANTED TO ADD MORE BEHAVIOUR TO IT. I WANTED TO ADD TRAFFIC AND SEE THE WORLD KIND OF COME ALIVE AND BE MORE DYNAMIC" WILL WRIGHT







WILL WRIGHT

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Will has always had an affinity with outer space. His fascination began as a boy when he had ambitions to become an astronaut. Ironically, none of Will's games, with the exception of *Spore*, have really sought to tackle the subject of space exploration, they merely teeter on its cusp teasingly and never take that plunge into the deep dark unknown. Will still occasionally panders to his early teenage passion for building robots and has even entered some of his creations into the US equivalent of *Robot Wars*. His first entry was a metallic door wedge with a doll's head on it. Nowadays, though, Will is an avid enthusiast of collecting training parts and replicas from the Russian space programme. It's a hobby that comes right back around to that interest in construction. "I love the way the Soviets have such a totally different philosophy about space engineering compared to NASA. Their stuff was very simple, robust, and highly reliable, contrary to popular opinion. My favourite piece is the main control panel off the Vostok space capsule" declares Will.



» *Streets Of SimCity* allowed you to import your *SimCity 2000* landscapes, take to the streets and battle against other cars.

about an engineer who befriends a deposed tyrant and sets about creating a miniature city with synthetic citizens for him to torment.

Will struggled to convince Brøderbund that *SimCity* could work. The company baulked at the game having no clearly defined win/lose elements, and Will was forced to promote the game himself. But without an affluent backer to finance this huge task, sales proved slow.

In 1987, during a party, Will sits coyly in the corner. Shy, he awkwardly tries to blend into the ambience, but fails miserably. His uncomfortable air catches the attention of Jeff Braun, and the pair begin talking about their interest in games: Jeff about a desire to enter the industry through publishing, and Will about developing a game that he candidly admits no one will touch with a bargepole.

"I think I struggled to find a publisher for *SimCity* because, at the time, most games were very action orientated or turn based. They all had really clear win/loose goal states. The idea of a sandbox game was pretty foreign to everybody," Will admits.

Jeff Braun, however, recognised its massive potential and persuaded Will to continue championing his creation. This encounter would spark the genesis of Maxis – which is 'six am' backwards, as it was Will and Jeff's hope that you will be playing their games until 6am – and under this banner, together, the pair would attempt to publish the game on home computers.

When the time came for Will to clear up lose ends with Brøderbund, the company finally gauged a clear output of Will's dynamism and was forced to eat humble pie. Børderbund signed Maxis a two-game co-distribution deal and, more vitally, saw *SimCity* released across a number of home computers, including a 'proper' C64 release.

Will and Jeff's direction for the *Sims* franchise would travel to juxtaposing worlds. In 1990, Will delivered the ultimate macrocosm with *SimEarth*, and a year later the ultimate microcosm with *SimAnt*. Sadly, despite such a staunch fan base, neither game, solely under the Maxis name, mirrored the success of his original cityscape classic.

SimEarth was an epic beast based on the writings and theories of Dr James Lovelock, who theorised that Earth resembles a superorganism – one made up of smaller organisms that can only exist within a group. The game was arguably one of Will's most adventurous and complicated sims. Players could manipulate the composition of the atmosphere and the rate of reproduction, and even toy with evolution. The game retained the hindering Mother Nature elements of *SimCity*, with natural disasters such as hurricanes, fires, volcanic eruptions and even disease providing hurdles within the game.

This superorganism simulator that Will had created would then be put under a microscope for his peculiar follow-up. Inspired by the writings of biologist Edward O Wilson, *SimAnt* was markedly different from the games before it. It was the first sim to present the player with a clear set of goals. Taking the role of a black ant, the player must drive colonies of hostile red ants, spiders, and eventually humans from their homes. Influence your denizens by using pheromones and attack enemies by overpowering them with swarms of drones.

Between the release of *SimAnt* and EA's eventual acquisition of Maxis, the market saw more sim-style games emerge from our side of the pond, as Peter Molyneux and Bullfrog kept the British end up. *Populous* was released the same year as *SimCity* and went on to spawn *Theme Park*, *Theme Hospital*, *Black & White* and even a popular RTS offshoot of the genre in the form of *Syndicate*. With EA having all of these influential titles within its stable, it was inevitable that it would be interested in acquiring Maxis. The publishing rights to both Bullfrog and Maxis meant EA would prove a formidable force in PC gaming. And after a return to form for *SimCity*, with the sublime *SimCity 3000* in 1999, under a new EA banner, Will's ant behavioural model would then provide the catalyst for his most popular and gutsy creation: *The Sims*, an idea that had been rattling around in his head for years.

The initial concept behind *The Sims* was as an architectural design game, originally stemming from an interactive doll house idea dubbed 'Home Tactics'. The concept shifted after it was recommended to Will that players should be scored by the in-game homeowners in relation to their quality of life. Perhaps fuelled by concern that the game's 'doll house' qualities could only appeal to female gamers, trying to convince a blinkered EA to agree to *The Sims* wasn't easy.

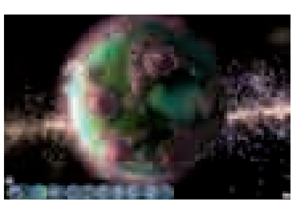
But Will's conviction prevailed and the game proved a runaway success. As expected, the home-making and social clique aspects did prove to be a resounding hit among young female gamers, but it also found a mass appeal across a broader spectrum of gamers of all other ages.

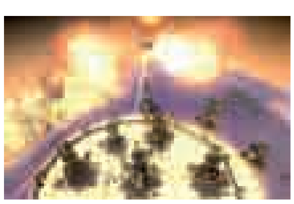
"There are several reasons why *The Sims* was so popular. The subject material was something everybody was intimately familiar with, and secondly, the game was very focused on the stories the players would tell with it, not stories we were trying to force upon the player. In some sense it's just a modern doll house, but in another way it's a

SPORE™

SPORE

Legions of PC owners excitedly await the release of Will Wright's fascinating next project. *Spore* has been in development since the dawn of the millennium, which indicates how significant this game is. It's shaping up to be something simply evolutional. Like all of Will's endeavours, *Spore* is split into a series of evolutional phases, each with their own unique style of play. It sounds like a truly head-spinning spectacle, offering gamers a revolutionary metaverse within which to create and converse. Sections of the game are said to borrow elements from *Pac-Man, Populous, SimCity* and even *Destroy All Humans!* for the sandbox sections of the game.







» Tweaks to *The Sims 2* came in the form of expansion packs and allowed you to give pets to your Sims.

very ripe environment for personal storytelling. When people use it to create stories, they naturally want to connect with other people to share those stories."

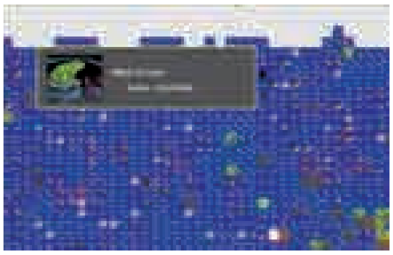
Will remembers, avidly, the first review he read about the game. "[It] was actually quite negative. Someone on some little website wrote a scathing review of the game. It was pretty depressing reading that first review, but two days later every other review that came out was raving about the game. That first review kind of rattled me, like, 'Oh my God, they didn't get it'.

But he need not have worried. Within a year, *The Sims* became his biggest hit, selling over 16 million copies and creating the most successful series of expansion packs ever created. Its sequel, *The Sims 2*, released four years later, can perhaps be seen as an almost faultless refinement of the game, which seems to quash any chance of an immediate sequel due to countless expansions and popular updates of the game. And in that respect perhaps the game can be described as the ultimate 'software toy', a virtual doll's house or an interactive box of Lego bricks for which players can purchase accessories.

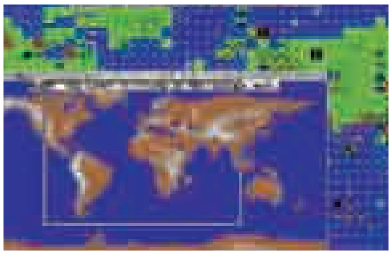
Will's latest project looks like it could eclipse all his ambitious accomplishments that have come before. *Spore* has been in development since 2000 and tackles the subject of evolution, bestowing the gamer with God-like powers. Its original working title, *Sim Everything*, speaks volumes about the epic scale of Wright's new pioneering venture. He's just a tad upset he didn't have to fight tooth and nail to get the project off the ground.

"I think the breadth of experiences in *Spore* will be higher than all my other games put together. I think, like *The Sims*, *Spore* is evolving to be even more toy and less hardcore sim. It's designed to be fun just to experiment with it. It was probably an unrealistic design goal in the first place, which is why I'm surprised that we're actually pulling it off. EA has been highly supportive of it every step of the way, which is almost a let down, because with *The Sims* I had to fight so many people to get it out the door, which was kind of exciting."

For more information about the gaming legend, a great resource is the Will Wright Fansite, which gave us a few additional few juicy quotes. Just visit www.will-wright.com.



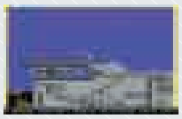
» *SimEarth* was very involved. You had the whole world in your palms, so big hands were definitely in order.

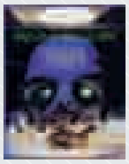


» Apparently, *SimEarth* was a massive hit with meteorologists. They used to enjoy playing it on their lunch breaks.

SIMPLY THE BEST…

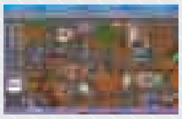
RAID ON BUNGELING BAY





This is where it all began, taking out enemy bases from above. This early Commodore 64 game feels wonderfully smooth to play, with the scrolling screen and convincing helicopter handling. However, it doesn't bode well for a game's self-esteem when its creator favours constructing it over playing it.

SIMCITY





Even those who would rather poke themselves in the eye with a rusty spoon than play a computer game can't dispute its brilliance. Stuart Campbell summed up the game's notoriety best in issue 37 of *Amiga Power* with a brilliant one-line review: "Look, I'm not reviewing *SimCity* again. No way. Forget It." He awarded it 90%.

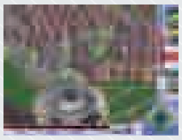
SIMANT





Ever had a deep-seated desire to be an ant? No, neither have we, but Will Wright's surreal virtual ant farm certainly went some way to stirring our imaginations. It was his first attempt at giving his virtual superorganism a social life. It might not have been much to look at, but let's be honest, neither are ants.

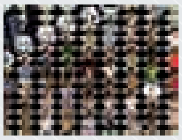
SIMCITY 3000





After a slew of *Sim* spin offs (including *Sim Copter*, *Sim Park* and *Sim Zoo*), and having the plug pulled on its SNES-exclusive *Sim Tunes*, under the parental umbrella of Electronic Arts, a more relaxed Maxis set about getting its *Sims* back on track. And it did just that with *SimCity 3000*.

THE SIMS





Is it a game or is it a toy? Perhaps it's just a virtual slice of hallowed pop culture? 20th Century Fox certainly thinks so – it's reputedly turning the *Sims* franchise into a movie. *The Sims* would be the first videogame to allow 11 year olds to sample the world of dog breeding by allowing them to get two avatars to have pixelated intercourse.

"THE BREADTH OF EXPERIENCES IN SPORE WILL BE HIGHER THAN ALL OF MY OTHER GAMES PUT TOGETHER. SPORE IS EVOLVING TO BE EVEN MORE TOY AND LESS HARDCORE SIM"

WILL WRIGHT



RIVAL TURF

OOZIE AND JACK TAKE SOME FLACK



- **PUBLISHER:** JALECO
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SUPER NINTENDO
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

When you're a kid it's easy to look for the good in things. Take *Rival Turf* for instance, a side-scrolling equivalent of a low-budget action movie. A kind of watery Van Damme flick that you enjoyed as a kid, but after catching a late-night screening of it on ITV4 20 years later you can spot its flaws like strings on a Thunderbird.

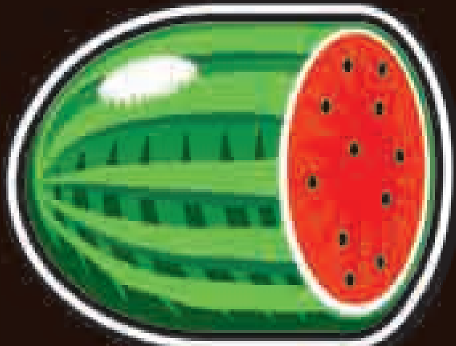
Side-scrolling fighters are notoriously by-the-numbers affairs. It's written in stone, probably, that every one must have a short guy and a fat guy. One will be ruggedly handsome; the other ruggedly ugly. One must have wrestling moves, another, a flying kick. All enemies must go by names like Gigante and Skinny, dress themselves in the dark, and one *must* turn up wearing a motorbike helmet that appears to offer zero shielding.

Rival Turf, aka *Rushing Beat*, adheres to all these brawler commandants, but throws in ridiculous and sporadic stage locations that an insane person would struggle to come up with after an Absinthe binge. Drawing you in with a generic looking LA street, your characters will fight their way to a bus station where they'll hop on a ridiculously long bus and fight with the passengers, before parking up outside an empty football stadium.

Inside, they'll fight through the bleachers, return to the streets, travel to the top of a skyscraper, hop on a Comanche attack chopper and use it to travel from one end of the United States to the other, before crashing into a jungle. Amazingly, this is only the halfway point in the game, there's still another three stages of randomness to go after all that.

The *Final Fight* port on the Super Nintendo was a disappointment, and until we got our hands on a Mega CD, so we could play the finest home iteration of the Capcom classic money could buy, *Rival Turf* got a lot of play on our SNES, especially as it boasted co-op play. After revisiting the game, however, we've come to appreciate that although it was more than capable of going toe to toe with its prolific Capcom rival in its day, it is truly madder than a rabid hatter.







VIDEOGAMES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT

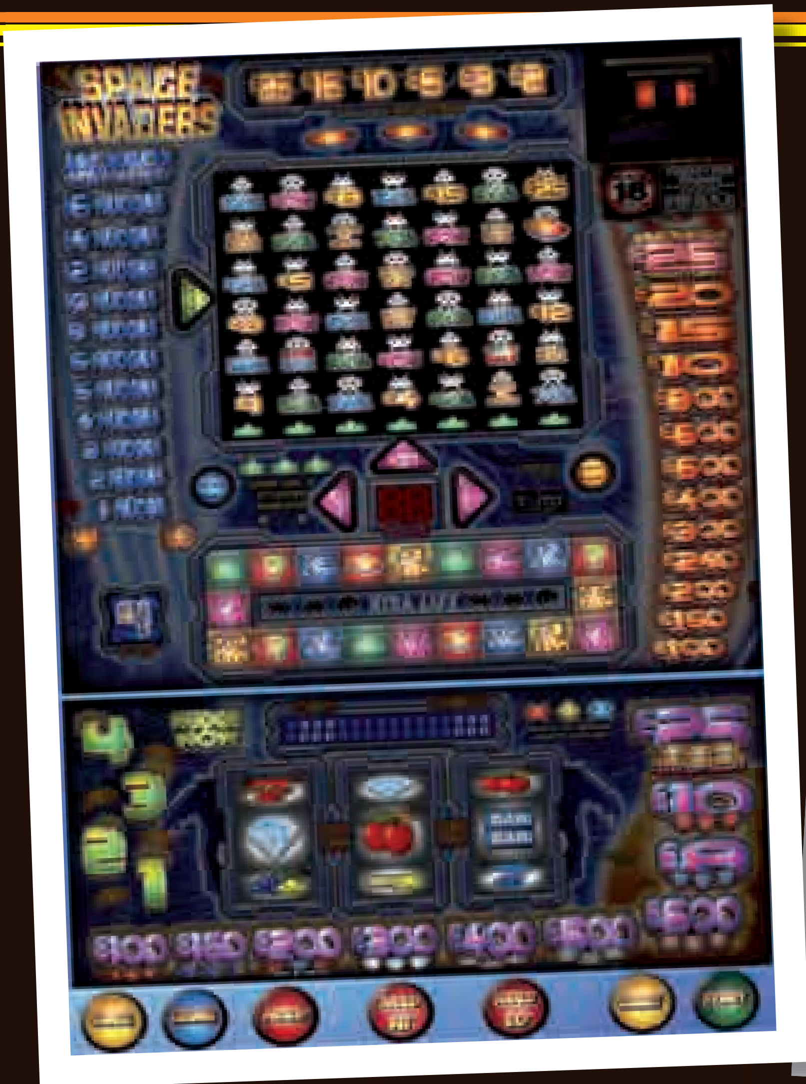
STUART CAMPBELL WAS SO TAKEN ABACK BY THE UNIVERSAL POPULARITY OF HIS VIDEOGAME PINBALL SPIN OFFS FEATURE IN RG45 THAT, BY PUBLIC DEMAND, HE'S WRITTEN ONE ABOUT FRUIT MACHINES TOO





Two kinds of people read this magazine. There are those looking for a nostalgic reminder of happy times spent playing videogames as a child, and there are those who crave the chance to discover the games they may have missed the first time round. This second group of people tend to look at gaming as a timeless pastime and want to read in-depth articles rather than those found in many shallow, hype-obsessed 'current' videogame magazines. And so **Retro Gamer** also covers recently released games that are 'retro' by style rather than their position in history. Members of the first group should move on to another feature immediately because this piece of writing very much caters to the latter camp. There is hardly anything in gaming more fascinating than an attempt to translate highly distinctive gameplay values to unsuitable-seeming platforms, whether it's making a board game out of *Centipede* or converting *Tempest* to the ZX81. And there can be few more challenging tasks for a game designer than bringing an all-action arcade game into the low-tech money-sucking realm of the fruit machine.

The modern amusement arcade is a very different place from that of the golden coin-op era of the Eighties and early-Nineties. The number of arcades hasn't declined all that significantly in the last 20 years, and most are still in the same place and look the same on the outside. However, where the interior used to be full of videogames, almost all city-centre arcades (and even a lot of seaside ones) are now mostly or entirely populated by no-armed bandits. But the superstars of gaming weren't going to be pushed out as easily as that. We've seen in previous issues of **Retro Gamer** how classic videogames have colonised other formats like board games and pinball tables, and fruit machines – or amusements with prizes (AWP) – were to be no different. With vastly varying degrees of success, coin-op companies have, for years, been bringing your favourite videogame stars, like washed-up boxers greeting casino visitors, into the adult world of gambling. So grab your fake ID, quickly grow a moustache, and try to look like your dad as we sneak into this magical palace of – quite literally – forbidden fruits, and try not to get ourselves grabbed by the bouncers. Madam.





» Fans of cheap double entendres will be delighted (in addition to the 'bouncers' joke in the intro) to hear that this particular style of game board is known in the AWP industry as a 'lapper'.

» At least there's been a half-hearted attempt at depicting some sort of maze in the background, since the game features no maze elements at all.



SPACE INVADERS

For no particular reason, we're going to look at videogame fruit machines in roughly the chronological order of the original games upon which they're based, so we start with what's actually one of the more recent AWPs to hit arcades – Crystal's interpretation of Taito's seminal *Space Invaders*. While we'll see titles later on that are more faithful to their inspiration, there's a pretty decent *Invaders* vibe here, not least in the shape of the large squadron of space baddies that form the central feature board. Once you've earned your way onto the reel loop below, you build up Laser Base 'lives' to access the feature board, and moves that allow you to aim at specific invaders on the board and collect the cash values or features they guard. You can also shoot down the Mystery Ship to get into the Big Money bonus area.

The AWP game employs lots of sound and visuals reminiscent of *Space Invaders 95* (see The Definitive Space Invaders in **Retro Gamer** issues 41 and 42) to capture the atmosphere of the 1979 original, and much like its monochrome predecessor it's an absorbing and tense game, which balances risk and reward on a tantalising knife edge. All fruit machines do that by nature, of course, but it's rarely put into such sharp relief as it is here by the constant thud-thud-thud of the trademark *Space Invaders* heartbeat – making the two art forms, on this occasion, a particularly good match.

PAC-MAN

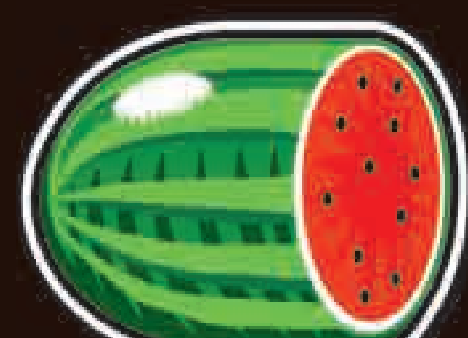
Almost 30 years after making his debut, *Pac-Man* is still videogaming's greatest figurehead – or, if you prefer, videogaming's biggest tart (and him a married man). In addition to an almost countless number of actual videogames, the yellow dot-chomper has sold his services to board games, pinballs, card games, scratch cards, mechanical versions and just about anything else that you could possibly fit under the banner of 'games'. Of all the many attempts to transfer *Pac-Man* gameplay values to other formats, the AWPs are perhaps the least successful of all. And the first one set the tone.

There's very little *Pac-Man* DNA on display here: the game board is simply a makeover of the standard 'double trail game' AWP design of the time, and except for the traditional Pac-death sound when you land on a ghost or Game Over square, none of the arcade game's trademark features make an appearance. It's a moderately entertaining AWP in its own right, but a vastly lazy use of the Pac-Man licence and it was briefly the least impressive of all the videogame fruit machines, until its sequel came along.

PAC-MAN PLUS

Curiously echoing the name of the most famous bootleg version of the original, the second attempt at a *Pac-Man* AWP was barely any different from the first. Despite moving to a completely different manufacturer (JPM

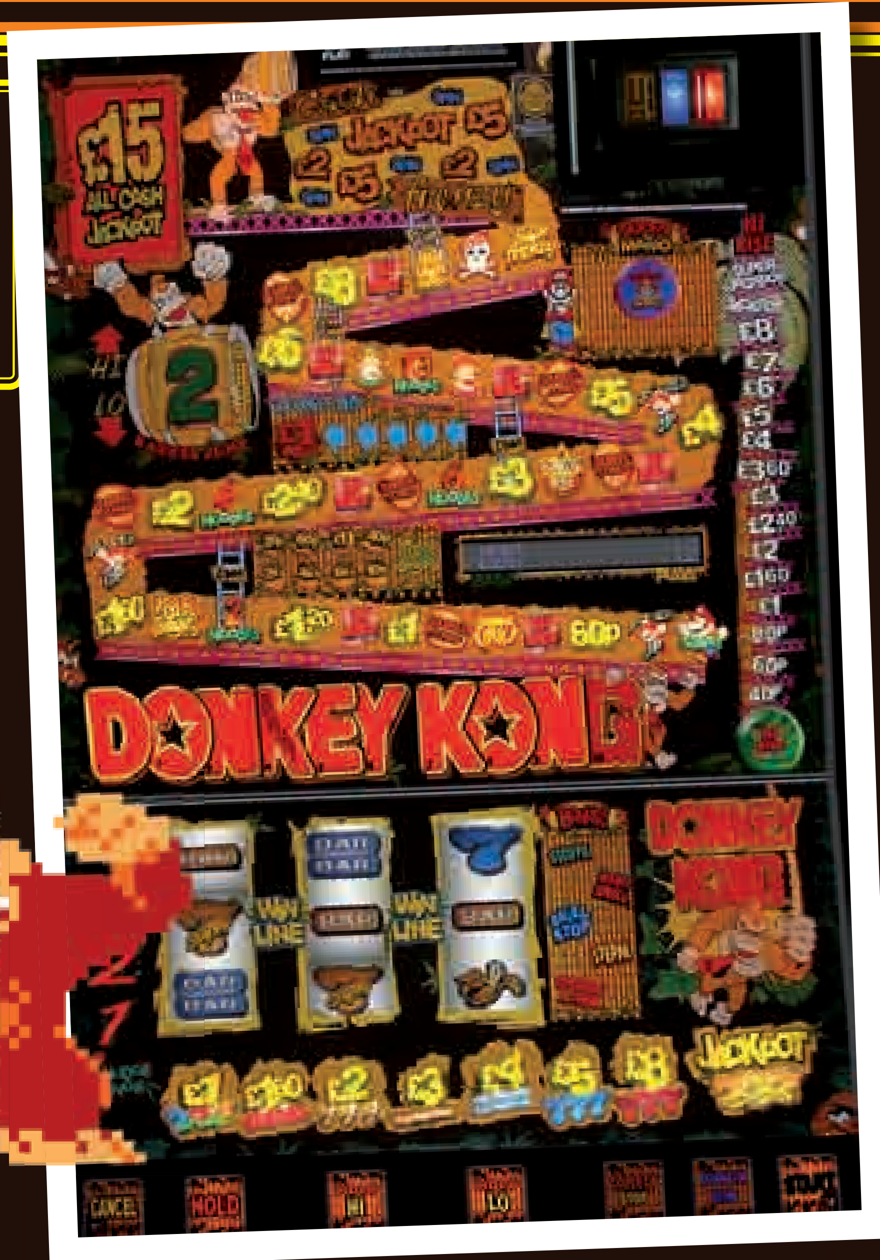






VIDEOGAMES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT





» Has it ever been adequately explained why a giant ape is wearing a huge groin-length kipper tie? You'd imagine it could cause terrible asphyxiation hazards while swinging between treetops.



» Some artist was up for literally minutes designing the layout of the *Pac-Man Plus* cabinet.

rather than QPS) and hardware standard, *Pac-Man Plus* is, in most respects, basically the same game as its predecessor. There's still the same trail-based main game board, with a second and more lucrative board, which can be reached from the first one, and there are still multiple types of win trail, although this time you get three rather than two.

There are lots of other minor changes, but this is an even poorer translation of Pac-Man to a fruit machine. There are now fewer authentic sound effect: the previous AWP's rudimentary attempt at a 'wocka-wocka' as you travel round the game board is gone, although this time you do get a cursory blast of the start jingle when you get the jackpot. Even the incredibly tenuous connections to the videogame, such as the ability to earn an extra life, have bitten the dust too. *Pac-Man Plus* is one of the weakest uses of the licence in history, and the worst videogame fruit machine 'conversion' of all time.

DONKEY KONG

Maygay's AWP interpretation of *Donkey Kong* is a much better effort than anything we've looked at so far. First, it is covered in proper DK artwork (*Donkey Kong Country* era), with Kong and Mario both well represented and the classic logo both prominently displayed on the top and bottom glasses and incorporated into play (lighting up the letters via the reels gets you onto the feature board). More importantly, though, the game board actually feels like playing *Donkey Kong*.

Laid out like the first stage of the videogame, there are ladders to climb, both full and broken; barrels to jump, using the Hi-Lo reel; and even power ups to collect (pressing the Super Mario button gets you a one-time bonus) from extra cash or an extra life to opening up the ladders and letting you zip to the top in half the time. It really captures the feel of *Donkey Kong*, and the many features and relatively generous structure make it an unusually enjoyable fruit machine.

MR DO!

When fruit machines started having 'games' on their upper halves rather than simply lists of the prizes you could win on the reels, they started out as simple trail boards where you progressed hoping to avoid the 'death squares'. The first great innovation of the era was the concept of the 'chase' game, in which an adversary would pursue your character. And it was into that genre that *Mr Do!* made one of gaming's unlikeliest comebacks. To be fair, it wasn't as out-of-the-blue as it might seem: the *Do!* AWP showed up in the early-Nineties during a brief attempt to revive the brand via

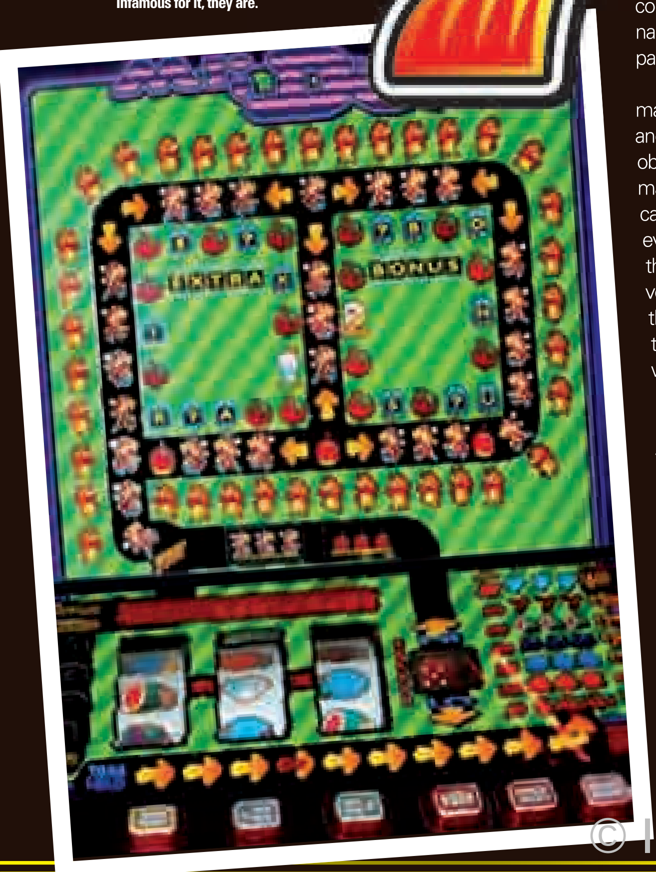


» Y'know, We've been playing this game for about four years and have only just noticed the 'Super Sonic' bit at the top left. We wonder what it does?





» If you see a *Mr Do!* AWP on eBay, you should email us immediately. You don't want one in your home because, er, they explode. Infamous for it, they are.



a Game Boy remake and Amiga/ST ports of the last coin-op in the original series, the splendid and excellently named *Do! Run Run*. We don't talk about the unpleasant pastel-coloured Neo Geo remake, which came later.

Like its videogame counterpart, the *Mr Do!* fruit machine is a tremendous piece of design, both in looks and playability (within the parameters of the format, obviously). Pretty much every element of the original makes some kind of appearance: monsters, cherries, cakes, powerballs, apple dropping, multiple routes and even the E-X-T-R-A extra life feature are all there, and the iconic artwork instantly catches the eye of any veteran coin-op connoisseur. The machine comes from the low-jackpot days, so you get plenty of chances to tackle the game board too. It's a lovely bit of work, and well worth snapping up if you see one on eBay.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

As with pinball, fruit machines skipped the second age of videogames entirely and didn't come back until the 16-bits took hold, although the chronology didn't keep pace. Sonic's AWP, for example, came out at more or less the same time as the Donkey Kong one. Appropriately enough, sound is the area where it really shines: almost every spot effect, jingle and tune is lifted straight from the videogame, with coin deposits accompanied by an unmistakeable chorus of "Se-ga!" and the trail-type game board backed by the classic Green Hill Zone melody. The visuals were also superb and almost as eye-catching to videogamers among banks of ordinary fruities as the *Mr Do!* cabinet.

In gameplay terms the Sonic board is very similar to that of Donkey Kong: a fairly basic trail with a few ladder-type short cuts, this time accessed by the Hi-Lo reel rather than being unlocked with a *Super Mario* bonus. With the higher jackpot, the game board is more inclined to kill you off quickly. When fruit machines went from £4 jackpots to £6, then £10, then £15, without increasing the price per play, they obviously couldn't afford to pay out as frequently. Still, there are a handful of Sonic-specific hooks thrown in, such as the loop-the-loop feature and the collection of rings to grab the elusive super repeater. Drop a couple of quid into this machine, though, and you'll be in no doubt that you're spending a few minutes in the Sonic universe.

MARIO KART 64

Nintendo had obviously been pretty happy with Maygay's first shot at a Mario-related fruity, and the company's rarely seen *Mario Kart 64* AWP was an even better distillation of its source material. Perhaps surprisingly, it doesn't go for the immediately obvious solution of a chase trail with Bowser hot on Mario's heels, but zipping around the course, collecting power-up blocks to help Mario, Yoshi and Donkey Kong race each other toward the Super Jackpot, the *MK64* game board is engrossing in its own right, regardless of the fact that you're mostly trying to win cash. It'll take many laps to experience all the board's many ways of pocketing some dosh – be it from the reels, the three central prize trails or the six character-based special features – and if you can find one set to the lower jackpot values and 5p/10p play you should get plenty of opportunities. Aesthetically the

VIDEOGAMES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT





» Does anyone remember *Roadkill* on the Amiga? "GET THE SUPER JACKPOT!" Ah, those were the days.



» Apologies for the poor quality of this screenshot. Everything else that's poor about the machine is the designers' fault.





Mario Kart 64 cabinet fits right in with its parent game, with a liberal sprinkling of authentic sound effects and music, and the huge main display and typefaces are instantly recognisable to any passing gamer looking for a more enjoyable way to chuck a few quid down some hungry bandit slots.

PAC-MANIA

As we have winessed already, poor Pac-Man hasn't enjoyed the same luck with fruit-machine translations as his fellow gaming luminaries, and things didn't improve with the most recent attempt despite a move to yet another new publisher and hardware standard. The *Pac-Mania* AWP at least adopted the most logical chase-style game board, with eternal nemesis Shadow pursuing our gaping-mawed hero toward the big money, but otherwise it was largely the same game again as with *Pac-Man* and *Pac-Man Plus*, save for a needlessly confusing double-trail system, which detracted from the game's focus.

Once again, the cabinet design lacked any sort of identifiable link (bar the presence of Pac-Man himself, of course) to the game it's supposedly based on. There's absolutely nothing specific to *Pac-Mania*, as opposed to ordinary vanilla *Pac-Man*, in either the art or the gameplay design, and basically all you get is a totally generic fruit machine with the *Pac-Mania* logo and a couple of little Pac-Man stickers slapped haphazardly over the top. (A later £25-jackpot model did at least triple the size of one of the Pac-Men.) The chase aspect makes it a marginally better game than the previous two efforts, but in the context of this feature it's still rubbish.

TOMB RAIDER

After *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, *Mario* and *Sonic*, videogaming's biggest icon is probably *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft. And poor Ms Croft has also been whored out to almost anyone with a few quid to front up for a licence. And you really don't want to know about some of the indignities that she has been subjected to in the dubious mobile-phone market. However, the implausibly endowed action heroine has come out of her 'amusements with prizes' adventures rather well. While the game board of *Tomb Raider* brings to mind *The Crystal Maze* rather than any of Lara Croft's grave-robbing escapades, it's one of the most complicated and involved fruit machines ever made, and manages to simulate the feel of the videogames far better than anyone could have hoped.

You get a varying trail to explore, weapons and items to collect, and even a health bar to help you survive combat with various pyramid-dwelling creatures. It even holds your hand less than most AWPs, so you actually have to learn your way around the reels and levels if you're to have a chance of reaching the treasure. As with the videogames, Lara's input is limited to the occasional "Uh" and "No", which only increases the authenticity, and by trying to capture the atmosphere rather than the gameplay mechanics, the JPM designers have taken a clever and effective lateral approach.

TETRIS

You might have been thinking that a title that is as inherently abstract as *Tetris* is the sort of videogame that couldn't possibly lend itself to a decent fruit-





» Dammit. We should have saved that 'bouncers' joke for this bit.

» For an extra videogame-related thrill, by holding reels two and three you can make the comedy announcer say "Zuma."



machine conversion – however, you would be completely wrong. Wait a minute, no you wouldn't. *Tetris* is obviously an insane choice for this sort of venture, and Mazooma's coders clearly threw their hands up in horror and gave up pretty much straight away. Rather than even attempt to work the classic *Tetris* pit into some sort of prize playfield (something which had already been handled rather more directly in the *Prize Tetris* arcade game a few years previously), this is a game that focuses, rather like *Tomb Raider*, on the broader themes of the original rather than directly replicating any of its core gameplay elements.

So you get to listen to your favourite *Tetris* tunes as you Cossack-dance your way around the game board, a comedy Russian announcer commentating in a very sinister accent. The iconic pieces are reduced to collectables, which form 'lines' earning you guaranteed-win spins. As AWP machines go *Tetris* is not brilliant (the auto-collect features in particular are highly irritating), still, it does have the best music that you're likely to hear in a fruit-machine arcade, so we suppose that's something.

And that's about it for our exploratory jaunt through the crazy madcap world of videogame-based fruit machines. Why not join us next time when we will be taking a fascinating look at the strange phenomenon of videogame-based bubblegum scratch cards. (Or possibly not – Ed.)



THE MAKING OF…

MAGIC CARPET

Kim Wild has often wished for a magic carpet. It can take you anywhere, costs next to nothing, doesn't require fuel and beats standing in the rain waiting for a bus any day of the week. Looks like she'll have to settle for a virtual one from Bullfrog instead though





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** BULLFROG PRODUCTIONS

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

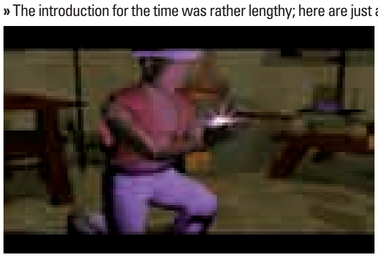
There are many games that are heralded as being pioneers of a genre, shaping the way for future generations and single-handedly creating new ones with a simple idea. Yet there are just as many that have the potential to make waves but fail to make an impact and slide into obscurity, never to be given a second thought. One of these was *Magic Carpet*, an often-overlooked title that was a technical marvel and offered a different style of shooter when compared to other games pigeonholed into the genre.

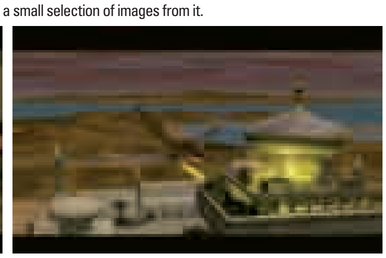
For those who have never played *Magic Carpet*, you take on the role of a wizard who has to restore the equilibrium of each world. To do so, you have to collect mana that is lying around or destroy the creatures that are in possession of it, before claiming it as your own and then transporting it back to your castle.

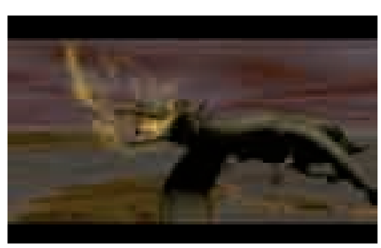
The premise of flying on a magic carpet while vanquishing enemies is something that Aladdin would be envious of, yet the idea for the game (like most of Bullfrog's portfolio) and its Arabian-inspired setting came purely out of experimenting with new graphical techniques. "I was playing with a texturing polygon draw and fractal landscape," explains Glenn Corpes, who created the 3D engine for the game. "I had what looked like a flight-sim engine but, like most people at Bullfrog, I wasn't interested in flight sims, the question of 'what else could you be flying without going sci-fi' was answered by someone with the idea of flying a magic carpet." He was also responsible for creating the landscape generator for each of *Magic Carpet*'s 50 levels. This was accomplished with a "fractal landscape generator based on a description of the algorithm used by Mike Singleton for *Midwinter*," says Glenn. "I'd used it before on *Powermonger*. I've used it since. It basically used a sneaky wrapping landscape which is easier than implementing any kind of borders. It also had 'intelligent' creatures, which sounds clever but lets you get away with no real level scripting. Laziness wins every time." Like many of Bullfrog's early releases, none of the game received any planned design. "I don't remember ever seeing a design document in all my time at Bullfrog, that was probably why they did so well," says Mark Healey, who was an artist on *Magic Carpet*.

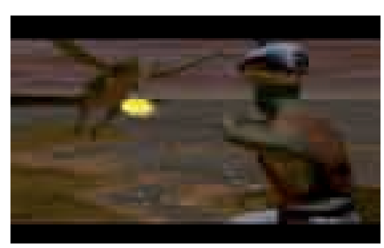
The range of spells reached 25 in all, from fireballs, volcanoes, earthquakes,

» The introduction for the time was rather lengthy; here are just a small selection of images from it.











» Here is the full devastating range of spells that you have at your disposal.



» Your eyes are not deceiving you, this is the 3D mode. Get your glasses at the ready.

lightning bolts and meteors to use against the monsters, while spells such as a shield can defend against attack. It is also possible to teleport back to your castle; recharge your health and mana before heading back into the warzone. Many of these were awe inspiring with the ability to alter the terrain entirely. "The landscape modifying spells were based around what was possible, rather like *Populous*," comments Glenn, citing that his favourite spell "was called 'chasm' (I think), it basically chopped huge canyons into the landscape."

When enemies were destroyed their carcasses were left behind, a trait shared with many Bullfrog games. "It's actually quite easy to do," explains Glenn. "Most games are written so that there are a number of active enemies, maybe with new ones being spawned in the place of those that have been destroyed. All *Magic Carpet* did was leave them laying around dead and, if it did need to spawn anything new, it would reuse the dead ones. This was very hard to spot happening as by then the player would have moved on."

The inability to crash the carpet ("quite handy when you can see less than 40 metres in front of your nose," says Glenn) added to the sense of freedom and exploration that was often experienced when flying around the levels. Being able to fly around without restriction was quite exhilarating and felt like how many would probably imagine a magic carpet to handle if anyone ever managed to invent one for a test ride, even if you were only able to do so from a first-person perspective. "It's just classic simple momentum and friction based movement, very, very simple algebra," says Glenn about programming the game's sense of flight. "I'd hazard a guess that most game movement works this way. All *Magic Carpet* did was use a lot less friction than most. Very simple stuff."

What stood out, particularly at the time, were the 3D visuals and the number of different special effects that were cutting edge, such as translucency, reflections in the water, shadows over the landscape, speed blur and clouds (many of which could be toggled on or off to suit the technology of your computer). Yet while it gave a good impression of being in fully fledged 3D, it was actually all just a clever illusion. Mark explains, "We were really limited by polygon count – we used scaled sprites for trees and characters. The palette was limited too – we had a fogging effect, but it all had to fit into 256 colours. We had some great coders (the sea was animated by a coder, not an artist!). This guy Finn was the lead artist, I think he was probably responsible for a lot of them. I remember making the large crab, it was so exciting seeing that in game for the first time. I did the sky, some palm trees, and a giant crab. I think I did a load of icons too, hmmm, I guess the crab wins."

"Only the landscape was in three dimensions," explains Glenn. "Everything else was rendered with a rotating/scaling sprite draw. I'd basically been playing with textured and shaded polygon rendering for a while and the 3D projection code in *Magic Carpet* was very primitive. I didn't even understand matrix maths properly at the time. It was

"THE QUESTION OF 'WHAT ELSE COULD YOU BE FLYING WITHOUT GOING SCI-FI' WAS ANSWERED BY SOMEONE WITH THE IDEA OF A FLYING A MAGIC CARPET" GLENN CORPES

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

POPULOUS
SYSTEMS: PC, ACORN, PC-ENGINE, ATARI ST, AMIGA, GAME BOY, SNES, MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM, SHARP X68000, FM TOWNS
YEAR: 1989

THEME PARK (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PC, MAC, AMIGA, SNES, MEGA DRIVE, PLAYSTATION, SATURN, 3DO, ATARI JAGUAR, SEGA MEGA CD, NINTENDO DS
YEAR: 1994

DUNGEON KEEPER
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1997



» The infamous fog effect (with the cotton-wool ball effect turned on).



» Early enemies such as these bats are relatively easy to kill, but later beasts can be a nightmare…



MAGIC CARPET

VIRTUAL INSANITY

Stereograms (those wonderful blue and red screens that come to life the minute you put on the glasses) have been in existence since 1838 when Charles Wheatstone discovered you could create an optical illusion with several 2D images. Since the arrival of computers, autostereograms have come about, where a 3D image is hidden inside a 2D one (think Magic Eye pictures). *Magic Carpet* features such a mode, although few seemed to notice. "I was particularly annoyed when *Tomorrow's World* showed "the world's first animating autostereogram" some time after the game was released. We also supported several brands of LCD shutter 3D glasses and even a few vomit-inducing VR headsets," remembers Glenn Corpes. We recommend playing at least once in this mode with some 3D glasses as a new way to travel. Strap yourselves in tight, prepare for turbulence and keep a bucket handy for any unexpected accidents.





» Don't shoot at the civilians, they won't like it and can have a tendency to get rather nasty.



» The castles are impressively huge and look rather spectacular.

all hacky short cuts rather than the real maths I've used since."

The mentioned fog effect is something of a controversial topic due to the way it limits how far ahead the player can see. When quizzed about this, Mark explains that, "We needed to have a fairly short drawing distance," although Glenn is rather more infuriated with the whole design. "I'm really glad this question is here, a classic case of games 'programmers' making us graphics coders look stupid," he says rather emotionally. "The fog was used to keep the number of triangles draw to a manageable number. Magic Carpet only drew 20 triangles of landscape ahead of the player; this meant something like 700 triangles per frame, a pretty impressive number back then. For most of the time I was developing the engine, a triangle was about 20 metres across, meaning you could see about 400 metres (20 times 20), which is not a huge distance but not bad. Then some smart aleck decided that we should build castles out of the landscape. This meant that suddenly a triangle was the size of the width of the castle walls, something less than two metres. 2 times 20 is only 40 so suddenly you could only see a tenth as far because all of the objects and characters were suddenly being drawn ten times the size and moving ten times as fast. This sort of thing happens all the time in game development."

After nine months of development, *Magic Carpet* was finally released, with some changes from its original design. "I had been playing with the underlying 3D and texturing code for a couple of years, pausing only to design a few levels for *Syndicate* for light relief," says Glenn. "The version that was released, however, was finished in about nine months after ditching all but my graphic engine and landscape generation code."

Understandably for a Bullfrog title in the early days, *Magic Carpet* swept the board with great reviews, *PC Gamer* scoring the game at 92%, *PC Zone* 96% and even *Edge* notching up an impressive 9/10 accolade. However, while it may have risen to the top among the critics, *Magic Carpet* failed to sweep the public off their feet. This had a lot to do with a certain other game that you may have heard of called *Doom*, released a year earlier. Although id Software's monster wasn't as technically impressive as *Magic Carpet*, its inclusion of realistic (for the time, anyway) blood and gore meant the game courted controversy, which ultimately meant more sales in the long run. CD-ROM drives were still a burgeoning technology and were the product of the early adopter with cash to burn, so very few PC users had the equipment to take the carpet for a ride. The fact that *Magic Carpet* demanded a high spec (a massive 486 Pentium processor folks!) and used network cards for multiplayer mode (even rarer than CD-ROM drives) meant only reviewers and hardcore gamers really got to experience the joy of carpet flight.

"I DON'T REMEMBER EVER SEEING A DESIGN DOCUMENT IN ALL MY TIME AT BULLFROG... THAT WAS PROBABLY WHY THEY DID SO WELL" MARK HEALEY

» Restore the world by collecting all the mana and you get this beautiful sequence.



» It's the *'Attack Of The Killer Bees'*, showing at a cinema near you.





» Rival wizards will pop up to fight you, making your life a little more difficult.



» Some levels see you instantly attacked by monsters, and so useful carpet manoeuvring is needed to survive.

CD-ROM technology had very little impact on the development of the game, however. "It really made very little difference, it just let us go to town with the intro movie and a few others really, says Glenn. "I'm not one hundred per cent sure there wasn't a huge-pile-of-floppies version of the game released later, maybe with shorter movies." Glenn's memory is accurate; a floppy disk version was released minus the introduction and with toned down graphical effects, although this would go mostly unnoticed. "There was much more room of course, so putting large pre-rendered animations on there didn't seem like such an issue," adds Mark.



» Don't be fooled, these beasties pack a nasty punch and are very dangerous. Take them down quickly.

Magic Carpet flew onto the PlayStation and Saturn consoles, although once again, managed to remain unnoticed by the public despite being decent enough conversions. "My only involvement with the PlayStation version was a little phone support for the guy converting the graphics engine," says Glenn. "The Saturn version had less smooth fog but was otherwise quite a good fit to its slightly weird non-triangle drawing hardware."

"I WAS MORE PROUD OF THE GRAPHIC ACHIEVEMENTS (OTHER THAN WHAT THOSE BASTARDS DID WITH THE FOG) THAN THE GAME" GLENN CORPES

Despite the lack of chart-topping success, Bullfrog released an expansion pack called *Hidden Worlds* and a much-criticised sequel a year later. Mark didn't contribute to the sequel – "I've always tried to avoid working on sequels, and have managed it so far," he says – while Glenn was needed elsewhere in the company. "To be honest, I barely played it and only worked on it for a week or two. I was off writing the graphic engine for *Dungeon Keeper* at the time. To be honest I was more proud of the graphical achievements (other than what those bastards did with the fog) than the game in the original. It had been the first game to do translucency, reflections and a few other effects. By the time the sequel came out these things were becoming pretty standard, so from my warped perspective as someone who tries to innovate with graphics, it didn't even compare."

Ahead of its time, *Magic Carpet* may have fared better had it been released with more modest requirements, but the beauty of PC gaming these days means that it can finally be played as it was originally intended. Although a DOS game, programs such as DOS Box can now run *Magic Carpet* smoothly on the most modern machine and can be experienced at a cheap price tag. As our flight with Bullfrog comes to an end, we urge you to pick up your very own carpet – it could be rather magical.

A MAGIC CARPET RIDE

Magic carpets have been spoken of in culture for hundreds of years. A well-known example is the Disney film *Aladdin*, where the character Aladdin uses the carpet to fly away before being trapped underground in the Cave of Wonder. *Arabian Nights*, on which *Aladdin* is loosely derived, is a mixture of tales told by Indian, Persian and Chinese travellers as they journeyed across the Chinese silk route, extended from northern China to the Middle East and Egypt. Interestingly, the use of a magic carpet never featured in the original Indian story of *Aladdin* in the conventional sense, instead instantly transporting the rider to their chosen location rather than through flight. Magic carpets are also referenced in Islamic tradition, which speaks of King Solomon owning a carpet on which his throne was placed that could transport all upon it to wherever he wished with a simple command.



» *Magic Carpet's* environments are a thing of beauty and mightly impressive to look at.



» You're not the only person with a magic carpet so no showing off.



ATARI 800XL

BROADLY CONSIDERED THE FINEST ALL-ROUNDER IN ATARI'S 8-BIT HOME COMPUTER RANGE, THE 800XL WAS ALSO THE BIGGEST SELLER IN GLOBAL TERMS. BUT DESPITE TOP-CALIBRE SOFTWARE SUPPORT FROM THE LIKES OF LUCASFILM, EA AND EPYX, IT NEVER PENETRATED THE HOME-COMPUTING MARKET TO THE EXTENT OF ITS NEAREST RIVAL, THE COMMODORE 64. MIKE BEVAN TAKES A WELL-EARNED RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF ATARI'S UNDERACHIEVING 8-BIT WONDER

INSTANT EXPERT

The Atari 800XL was one of the third generation of Atari 8-bit home computers, and was preceded by the Atari 400, 800 and 1200XL. It is backwardly compatible with most software. It was Atari's bestselling 8-bit computer system worldwide.

Atari's home computers were the first to use special custom processors for graphics and device input/output, which freed up the main CPU for other tasks, a concept used by developers Jay Miner and Joe Decuir, on leaving Atari, for the design of the Amiga.

The Atari 8-bit computers were based on a 1.79MHz 6502 CPU, a considerably faster clock speed than its competitor, the C64, which had a 1MHz 6502 processor. As a result many maths-intensive titles, such as *Rescue On Fractalus!*, were faster on Atari machines than on the C64.

The 800XL had a little brother, the Atari 600XL, which was effectively the same machine but came equipped with 16K RAM, as opposed to the 800XL's 64K, and lacked the 800XL's composite video output.

The custom graphics chips in the 600XL/800XL computers were called ANTIC and GTIA, and offered sprite handling, advanced hardware scrolling and collision detection, and up to 256 colours (as opposed to the C64's 16-colour palette).

Four sound channels were available, originating from the Atari 800XL's custom POKEY chip, which also handled peripheral input/output. It was co-designed by *Star Raiders* creator Doug Neubauer.

A number of classic cross-platform 8-bit system games were initially programmed for Atari computers, including *Ballblazer*, *Rescue On Fractalus!*, *M.U.L.E.*, *Archon*, *Boulder Dash*, *Dropzone*, and *Miner 2049er*.

Doug Neubauer reveals that Atari originally intended its computer line to have the same sound processor as the 2600.

The marketing, and consequently overall success of Atari's home computer line was catastrophically affected by the failure of the 2600 (VCS) console in 1983. The company had $400 million of unwanted console products in the pipeline in the face of a collapsing 2600 market, diverting corporate attention from the needs of the unfortunate Home Computer Division.

According to imdb.com, the repeated electronic beeping sound effect heard in the shuttle cockpit in the movie *Airplane II* is the sound of an Atari 8-bit computer's disc-drive booting up.

In the fifth issue of fondly remembered C64 magazine *Zzap!64*, which hit newsstands in September 1985, Archer Maclean penned a tips guide for his classic shoot-'em-up *Dropzone*, which contained the oft-quoted (and misquoted) following comment. "The Atari, being the Porsche of home computers is capable of running *Dropzone* 2.5 times faster than the 64 and can handle any amount of blobs on screen. However, the 64 is still a respectable BMW 316 (S reg)." It was an unusual statement to find in a Commodore-oriented publication, and while Retro Gamer prefers to remain neutral in any debate regarding the technical superiority of either of the two competing machines, Archer may well have had a point.

Compared to the more popular home computers of the day, such as the ZX Spectrum and C64, Atari's computers were often regarded as high-end, and came equipped with an equally high-end price tag. In 1984, the newly released Atari 800XL, the computer designed to compete with the C64, was priced at around £250, considerably cheaper than its older sibling, the Atari 800, had been on launch in the US, but far more expensive than the Spectrum (£130) or C64 (£199). A higher price point than the more popular machines, and an over-reliance on the expensive cartridge format plagued Atari computer software. However, many classic games that originated on the Atari 8-bit computers, were faster and more refined than the now often better-known conversions on other contemporary platforms. But by the mid-Eighties, Atari had found to its cost that high-quality software, flashy technical specifications and above average build-quality simply wasn't enough to win in the fight for the hearts and minds of hobbyists and computer dealers whose main concern was competitive pricing.

In hindsight, Atari's relative failure with its 8-bit home computer range, at least in terms of longevity compared to its rivals, seems harsh when you consider that they were very much ahead of their time in conception. Work began on the company's first two home computer systems, the Atari 400 and 800, after the release of the 2600 console in 1977. "We knew we needed to leapfrog the 2600 before somebody else did," says Atari designer Joe Decuir. "We saw the Apple II, Commodore and Radio Shack machines coming, and we wanted to design a machine that would support home computer characters and bitmap graphics." Another member of the 400/800 dev team was Jay Miner, future 'Father of the Amiga', who headed design of the graphics display/output chips known as ANTIC and CTIA. A third custom chip (POKEY) handled peripheral input/output and sound, and these separate co-processors freed up the main CPU, improving performance. An industry first, the concept of separate dedicated chips to drive graphics and sound would be taken to its logical extreme when ex-Atari employees, including Jay, were hired by Commodore to produce its first 16-bit home computer.

Debuting in the US in autumn 1979, the Atari 400 and 800 computers sold for $549 and $999 respectively. The 400, with its membrane keyboard was geared towards the home hobbyist and games market and was intended to ship with 4K of RAM. The 800 was designed as a higher-end or business machine, and came equipped with 8K of memory. Both computers were capable pieces of hardware



Year released: 1983

Original price: US: $299, UK £249

Buy it now for: £15+

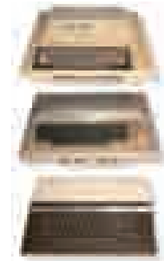
Associated magazines: Atari User, Page 6 (UK), Antic, ANALOG (US)

Why the Atari 800XL was great… Of all of Atari's 8-bit home computers it was the most competitive all-round package, with a full 64K RAM, built-in BASIC, great audio/visual capabilities and a decent, compact casing and keyboard. Programmers loved the quirks and cutting-edge capabilities of Atari's hardware, and some of the games software it spawned was truly ground-breaking. Much of the technical know-how gained in the design of the Atari 8-bit line went on to be used in the Amiga, and even today's PCs.



"COMPARED TO THE MORE POPULAR HOME COMPUTERS OF THE DAY, SUCH AS THE ZX SPECTRUM AND COMMODORE 64, ATARI'S COMPUTERS WERE OFTEN REGARDED AS HIGH-END, AND CAME EQUIPPED WITH AN EQUALLY HIGH-END PRICE TAG"

ATARI 800XL



» Two generations of Atari personal computers. The Atari 400 (top), Atari 800 (middle) and Atari 1200XL (bottom).



» Advertisements for the early Atari 8-bit computers publicised the systems' cutting-edge graphic capabilities and advanced sound compared to those of rival machines.

OTHER VERSIONS WHEN ONE MACHINE ISN'T ENOUGH

Atari 65XE

This replacement for the 800XL, launched in 1985, features sleeker styling, an updated version of Atari BASIC, and a new memory management chip called 'Freddie'. There's little to make it a better buy nowadays than its predecessor, although its very similar big brother, the 130XE, is notable for its 128K system RAM (double that of the 65XE and 800XL).



XE Game System

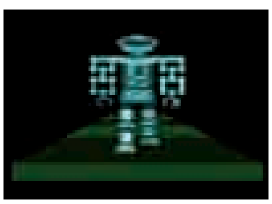
Released in answer to Nintendo's NES, this was a modified 65XE computer in console guise (more contemporary looking than the rather dated 5200 console). Add-on features included a detachable keyboard, which was a little 'mushy' in comparison to those of the computer line, and a light-gun. It came with *Missile Command* and Atari BASIC built-in.



Atari 800XE

The last 8-bit computer to be produced by Atari, the 800XE was almost identical to the 800XL, but with the slim-line casing of the 65XE/130XE computers. It has other similarities to the 65XE, such as the inclusion of the 'Freddie' chip. The 800XE had a short life span, and was sold for only a year. It was popular in Eastern European territories such as Germany and Poland.





» The walking Atari Robot demo, which adorned many a computer shop window, demonstrating the impressive colour palette of the Atari computers.

for their time, sporting an unprecedented 128-colour palette, hardware sprites, four joystick ports, and cartridge, peripheral and memory expansion interfaces allowing unheard of levels of customisation. By the time of its launch, falling RAM prices allowed Atari to increase the 400's memory capacity to 8K. Eventually the 400/800 shipped with a standard 16K or 48K of RAM respectively.

Atari's marketing division made considerable efforts to publicise the advanced audio-visual features of its home computer systems, focusing on their unique custom architecture, fast full-colour graphic capabilities and multi-channel sound. Atari CEO Ray Kassar's mandate to the company's design engineers had been that the systems should be invaluable for home and business use and have the capabilities to play exciting, cutting-edge games. Unfortunately, the company's reputation as a videogame manufacturer backfired on its Home Computer Division, as high-end consumers opted for the more business-like Apple II rather than the Atari 800, and gamers found the high cost of the 400 prohibitive compared to the cheaper VCS console. However, Atari did have one considerably powerful ace up its sleeve to lure gamers to its 8-bit computer line.

Doug Neubauer, an Atari engineer and co-designer of the POKEY chip, had developed a game while working at Atari. Inspired by the generic '*Star Trek*' games he'd seen running on mainframe systems, Doug took advantage of the new Atari hardware, which he describes as "a quantum leap from the 2600" to update the game with a first-person 3D perspective. Not a huge logical progression by today's standards, except for one fact. No one had ever created a full free-roaming 3D game before. The result, *Star Raiders*, was staggering when first experienced in 1979 as one of the launch titles for Atari's personal computers. It became one of the first examples of a home computer 'killer-app' with many customers purchasing a 400 or 800 and a *Star Raiders* cartridge just to enjoy Neubauer's creation, among them a youthful Archer Maclean. "I saw *Star Raiders* and it just blew me away," he says. "Something very special was happening. I made it my mission to find out what." Another fan, Jeff Minter, couldn't wait to play it. "You can keep your *Elite*s and *Wing Commander*s, for me the original *Star Raiders* will always be the best. 8K of sheer 6502 code poetry," he eulogises.

A further coup came in 1982, when LucasArts (then Lucasfilm) agreed to produce its first two hotly anticipated games, *Rescue On Fractalus!* and *Ballblazer*, exclusively for Atari machines. Both were developed on the Atari 800. "They wanted us to develop for the 2600 since it was their biggest installed base, but we were able to convince them we could do much more impressive games on the newer systems," says *Fractalus!* designer David Fox. "The target platform, initially, was the 5200. The other competing platforms at the time were the Apple II and C64," he continues. "The C64 didn't have much of an installed base then, but the Atari had a great set of chips, allowing us to squeeze a lot more out of the machine than we could on a computer like the Apple, which really had nothing like that." Ultimately, Lucasfilm's titles weren't enough to push Atari's computers into mainstream popularity, not being released until several years after the 5200 versions, and after the C64 had started to emerge as the 'it' machine for consumers. Lucasfilm eventually conceded and converted its games to the C64 and other platforms.

> "ATARI'S REPUTATION AS A VIDEOGAME MANUFACTURER BACKFIRED ON ITS HOME COMPUTER DIVISION"

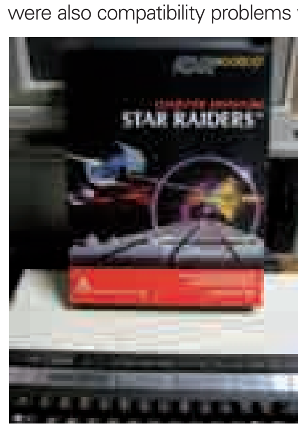
Around the time of the Lucasfilm deal, Atari was set to launch a successor to its 400/800 computers, with which it planned to phase out the older systems and boost flagging sales. Hitting shelves in January 1983, the Atari 1200 was intended as a more 'adult' computer system, and built on the successful 400/800 architecture, adding a professional-looking keyboard, 64K of RAM and improved peripheral support. The machine used a new graphics co-processor (GTIA) with an improved 256-colour palette. This had recently replaced the older CTIA chip in the 400/800 series and would be used in all future Atari 8-bit models. Designed to compete directly with the Apple II, the machine was unsuccessful in the competitive and soon-to-be-crowded market for business systems. There were also compatibility problems with some 400/800 software

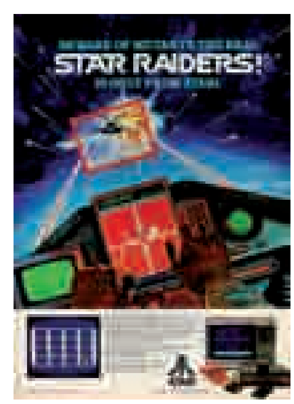
PROJECT WIZARD

Atari's hard-working engineering department always strived for an experimental approach to design, although a number of ambitious and unusual research projects only ever reached prototype stage. One was Project Wizard, an incredibly strange concept that would have caused somewhat of a stir in the industry had it ever seen the light of day. "It was the first, and only game controller that used your mind," says research engineer Tim McGuinness. "It was created in 1982, and was one of my projects. It used three electrical sensors on the forehead to control right-left motion of the cursor, and was designed for games like *Breakout*. 1,000 pieces were manufactured under the Atari Wizard Controller name for the Home Computer & VCS lines, but were never released for sale. But it was so cool. You put on a headband with three sensors, and you willed the controller right and left – it took about 10 minutes for most people to get control. Some could control it with blinding speed. I think the main reason it didn't go on sale was the psychological stigma of a computer reading your mind. It actually worked using simple electrical signals, through the skin, but I believe that was the factor. Especially in those days, when the public had no idea of how limited the power of their computers was…"



» Atari's 1981 computer product-line-up, with the 400 and 800 personal computers taking pride of place in the centre of the picture.





» **Left:** Atari's 'killer-app' *Star Raiders* perched atop the second-generation 1200XL. **Right:** A magazine advert for *Star Raiders* made a point of highlighting its pioneering first-person play-view.

COMMUNITY THE BEST ATARI WEBSITES

Atarimania

www.atarimania.com

A fabulous resource, in a similar vein to World of Spectrum and Lemon64, this site is a wonderful place to start for an overview of Atari 8-bit hardware and software. Atarimania has an enormous database of downloadable games and software, with screenshots and full-colour manual scans for many titles. It also features the occasional developer interview.

Atari Museum

www.atarimuseum.com

A massively impressive site, with a whole wealth of information covering Atari's 30-year history. Its archives are brimming with first-hand interviews with Atari staff, technical documents, Atari magazine scans, old adverts and press releases, and a bucket-load of other assorted resources. You name it and, if it's Atari-related, it will probably be here somewhere.

Back In Time

www.backntime.net

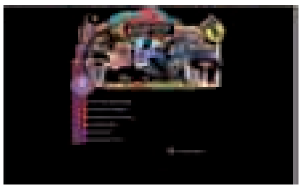
Another large Atari-oriented site with information and photos of pretty much every console and home computer model ever released by the famous company, along with features on official and third-party add-ons, and peripherals and unreleased prototype hardware. Check out the radio-show episodes featuring guests such as Sid Meier and Nolan Bushnell.

Atari Age

www.Atariage.com

Last but not least we have probably the most popular Atari website in existence, if its incredibly busy and extensive forums are anything to go by, that is. Admittedly, the main content does concentrate on Atari console hardware (particularly the VCS) but the 5200 section is useful, and as an Atari community it has, to our knowledge, no peers in all cyberspace.









titles due to the 1200XL's upgraded BIOS. The unpopularity of the 1200XL drove sales of the 800 as consumers raced to purchase the cheaper machine before it was discontinued. The system was an embarrassing flop for Atari, retailed for just four months before the plug was pulled on production. It was never sold outside the US.

Tim McGuinness, Atari's assistant director for corporate research engineering at this time, was a major player in the design of the 1200 and the later XL models. "Before the release of the 1200XL, Atari had VisiCalc, a few great databases, and a good word processor. In fact, many employees at the company used Atari 800 computers for all business work. But the early Ataris were marketed as home computers and by late 1982 we were months from the release of the IBM PC and first Compaq 'Lunchbox' PC." Despite the lack of consumer support for the system, Tim remains proud. "The 1200XL was the big step up from the 800/400 series," he says. "Later systems such as the 800XL were lesser progressions from an evolutionary standpoint." In fact, the machine may have been better received had Atari not been struggling financially. "The company was falling apart in the US, as the major corporate marketing engine was dealing with the collapse of the VCS console market. The home computers were a poor stepchild," says Tim.

In 1983, Atari went into direct competition at the lower end of the market. Squaring up against the C64, it launched the Atari 600XL and 800XL computers. Externally quite similar to the 1200XL, but abandoning the function keys and built-in demos, they were the first machines to include in-built Atari BASIC as standard. The 600XL/800XL came equipped with 16K or 64K RAM respectively and had two joystick ports. The Parallel Bus Interface (PBI) was added, allowing the addition of advanced peripherals. The machines were very much scaled down versions of the 1200XL, and to reduce production costs further following Jack Tramiel's takeover of Atari in 1984, much of the manufacturing infrastructure was moved to Hong Kong. The price cutting was seen as an effort to directly undercut Commodore, who had forcibly ejected Tramiel earlier in the year. However, production delays had meant that most of Atari's stock of 600XL/800XL machines had hit retailers too late to compete against the C64 over the Christmas 1983 period, and Atari never managed to catch up with its rival from this point on. Coupled with the collapse of the 2600, Atari was on a slippery slope, and would never again scale the heights of its ascendancy under founder Nolan Bushnell. Despite these problems, the Atari 800XL remains the company's most successful 8-bit computer.

Atari soldiered on under Tramiel with some modifications to its 8-bit computers, such as the XE range and the XE Game System, released in 1987 as a competitor to the NES. In 1992, with its 16-bit ST home computer locking horns against Commodore's Amiga, Atari finally dropped all support of its 8-bit line, 15 years after the series' conception and long past the peak of its popularity. Brilliant and technically ahead of their time, Atari's 8-bits tried to be jack of all trades but fell short of winning the battle with Commodore or Apple. Perhaps their potential as a gaming platform was never quite realised. "Although the Apple II was the obvious target, we also conceived of the 800 as the next-generation gaming machine," says Joe Decuir. "In my opinion it had no peer until the NES came out five years later in Japan." Adds Tim McGuinness: "We still use Atari technology in today's PCs. Our MS DOS floppies use Atari DOS format. USB is the grandson of Atari Serial (the interface between Atari peripherals)." Now that's certainly something to think about.



» *Ballblazer* and *Rescue On Fractalus!*. Two ground-breaking titles that were developed by Lucasfilm Games, on Atari 8-bit computers.

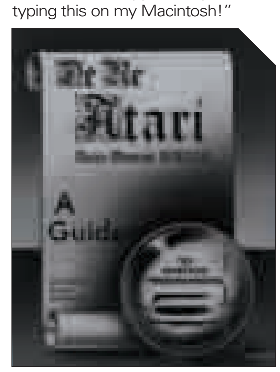




» Third-party support from publishers like Synapse, Epyx, Datasoft, First Star and Sierra was a great boost to the Atari home computer software catalogue.

DE RE ATARI

A long-held popular myth is that Atari deliberately held technical information on its 8-bit computers from third-party programmers, so that its internal developers would have an advantage. It's a rumour that ex-Atari software developer Chris Crawford (of *Eastern Front* fame) is eager to quash. "When the 400/800 were released, Atari executives assumed that the technical details of those machines would be kept secret, as they were with the VCS. Everybody in engineering knew that was absurd, but it took a while to convince them it would be better to encourage outside software developers. What did the trick was the early press reviews saying that the 400/800 were great machines but didn't have as much software as the Apple II. In December 1979, they issued a memo saying all technical documentation was now publishable. I had a number of friends in the software community and got on the phone to them. They wanted photocopies of the documentation, which I ran off myself and shipped to them. Thenceforth, all you had to do to get the documentation was to ask. We sent out exactly the same documents that we ourselves used. There was never any attempt to hold anything back after that. However, the documentation was not easy to understand. By December 1980 there were enough developers that I proposed a Software Development Support Group, to assist developers both inside and outside Atari. We wrote De Re Atari to make the documentation easier to understand." This legendary tome, published in 1982, was an invaluable aid to programmers like Archer Maclean, who likens reading it prior to creating *Dropzone* to a 'religious experience'. "If we'd started the Support Group sooner I think we could have beaten Apple to become the top 8-bit machine, and fended off the C64," says Chris. "But we didn't, which might be a good thing. If we'd beaten Apple, I might not be typing this on my Macintosh!"



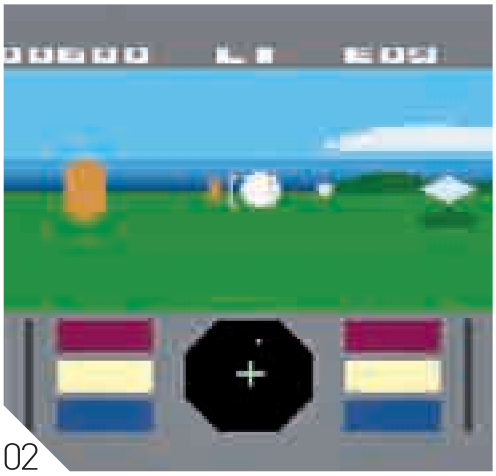
THANKS TO Tim McGuinness and Mike Cartledge for supplying several machine images, and soundhog for the loan of Atari software.

ATARI 800XL

PERFECT TEN GAMES

The Atari 8-bit personal computers were privy to some of the most impressive games of their time, and the Atari 800XL is still a great platform on which to experience them. Here's a selection of ten of the finest titles to whet your appetite. If we've managed to miss any of your favourites then feel free to let us know by visiting the forums at www.retrogamer.net/forum


01


02


03


04

STAR RAIDERS

» **RELEASED:** 1979
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
» **CREATED BY:** DOUG NEUBAUER
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** QIX

01 **Hugely influential to many of those that witnessed it on Atari's fledgling personal computers, *Star Raiders* was the title responsible for shifting more Atari 400/800 machines than any other.** The granddaddy of the *Elite*-style 'space opera', it was also the world's first free-roaming first-person perspective game. Updating the generic '*Star Trek*' games played by many a college student on mainframe systems, it was a striking mix of strategy and fast, immersive graphics that effortlessly sucked players into its universe. Criminally, the game's creator, Doug Neubauer, didn't make a single penny from *Star Raiders*, which he created in his spare time while he was employed as an Atari design-engineer.

ENCOUNTER!

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NOVAGEN/SYNAPSE
» **CREATED BY:** PAUL WOAKES
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** MERCENARY: THE SECOND CITY

02 ***Encounter!* was so good that when Jeff Minter first saw the game demoed at a computer trade show he hastily convinced author Paul Woakes to make it a full commercial product, giving birth to software house Novagen and paving the way for *Mercenary*.** Playing out the mechanics of *Battlezone*, at what seems like around a thousand miles per hour, and with filled, solid objects zooming in and out of the screen, *Encounter!* was a technical marvel. And the impressively scary 'warp-sequence' between levels, which flings hundreds of enormous Ping-Pong balls at you while you struggle to avoid a collision, will still have you squirming in your seat like an Olympic rower with a scorpion in his pocket.

RAINBOW WALKER

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SYNAPSE
» **CREATED BY:** STEVE COLEMAN
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** BRIMSTONE

03 ***Rainbow Walker* is a unique and extremely playable title that is totally exclusive to the Atari 8-bit systems.** Borrowing the colour-filling mechanics of *Q*Bert* and transposing them onto a chequered pseudo-3D scrolling play-field, its impressive z-axis scrolling utilises the Atari's unique graphic capabilities very nicely. Guiding our rotund hero Cedric across a series of aerial platforms fills in squares with a spectrum of colours, and moving up or down at either vertical extremity scrolls the patterned play-field towards or away from you. Enemy creatures can, and will, undo all of your hard work and must be avoided or 'pushed' off the rainbow by scrolling it until a gap appears beneath them. An attractive game and a really clever concept.

PASTFINDER

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACTIVISION
» **CREATED BY:** DAVID LUBAR
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** GHOSTBUSTERS

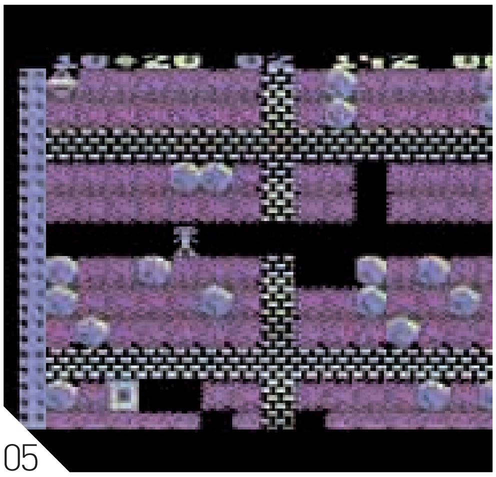
04 **Despite a limited release by Activision (it remains one of the hardest titles to track down), *Pastfinder* is a great progressive shoot-'em-up which makes good use of the Atari's unique hardware.** Helming a frog-like craft (the 'Leeper') your task is to explore a hostile planet while hunting down long-lost alien 'artefacts'. The scrolling forced-perspective terrain (resembling a top-down *Zaxxon*) is highly atmospheric, with great use of shadows, and the Leeper is a wonderfully charismatic creation with a superb control 'feel'. There's a huge *Star Raiders*-style strategy-grid to traverse in search of ancient loot, and guiding your 'space hopper' through the radioactive wasteland at breakneck speed is enormous fun.

BOULDER DASH

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** FIRST STAR SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** PETER LIEPA
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** ASTRO CHASE

05 **At the risk of being predictable we couldn't really leave *Boulder Dash* out of our Perfect Ten.** Developed for the Atari 400/800 by Peter Liepa and Chris Gray, its beautiful gameplay (inspired by *The Pit*, an arcade game co-created by Andy Walker of Taskset fame) has been enthralling generations of gamers on various platforms for over 20 years, and its hero, Rockford, is a bona fide gaming icon. The dynamic physics, the predetermined 'rules' for enemy creatures, and the thought-provoking puzzle-like nature of the game were all masterstrokes. This then, the original creation in the lineage, is a must-play, with some outstanding and very challenging levels, which greatly deserve revisiting.





05



06



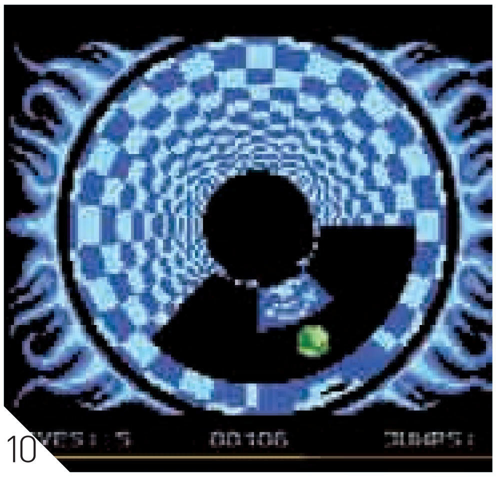
07



08



09



10

DROPZONE

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** US GOLD
» **CREATED BY:** ARCHER MACLEAN
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** OUTRUN

06 With *Dropzone,* a young Archer Maclean took a large helping of *Defender,* a sprinkling of *Jetpac,* and cooked up a brilliant and blisteringly paced Jarvis-esque mega blast. Like a fine wine, *Dropzone* has aged remarkably well, and the original Atari version is most definitely the finest vintage on offer. Considerably bettering Atari's already very decent *Defender* conversion, Archer's magnum opus displays an incredible eye for detail and pushes the Atari hardware to the limit with its incredibly rapid smooth-scrolling, pixel-perfect collision handling, incredible particle effects and fantastic playability. Even in death the game rewards the player's ineptitude with a spectacular on-screen firework display.

RESCUE ON FRACTALUS!

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACTIVISION/EPYX
» **CREATED BY:** LUCASFILM GAMES
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** PITFALL!

07 If *Star Raiders* managed to shoehorn a small but significantly impressive corridor of space into an 8K Atari cartridge, *Rescue On Fractalus!* went a step further by cramming a whole planet into a 48K computer. Lucasfilm's first-person fractal flight-sim delivered an incredibly immersive experience, which many thought impossible to achieve. Its release was a defining moment for the Atari 8-bit systems it was originally designed for, wowing gamers on their first exposure to its amazing real-time landscape. The Atari's faster processor means that this is the definitive version of the game, running around one-and-a-half times faster than the C64 conversion.

BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BIG FIVE SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** BILL HOGUE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** SCRAPER CAPER

08 Bill Hogue's excellent sequel to his classic *Miner 2049er* is an outstanding platform romp that improves on its predecessor by some distance. Bob's mine now has a satisfyingly solid isometric angled look, and there's a multitude of new contraptions to help (or hinder) our hero. With 25 stages (more than twice the number of the original), and some extremely devious screens with a proliferation of slides, pipes and teleports to scramble your brain, *Bounty Bob Strikes Back* will test your platforming skills to the max but have you coming back for more. And top players can glorify their achievements on one of the most polished and appealing high-score tables of all time.

THE EIDOLON

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACTIVISION/EPYX
» **CREATED BY:** LUCASFILM GAMES
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

09 Probably the most ambitious, original and downright atmospheric title of Lucasfilm's fractal triptych, *The Eidolon* was scaring the nappy-filler out of gamer's many years before *Doom* or *Resident Evil* were. By cleverly inverting the fractal mountains from *Rescue On Fractalus!* and *Koronis Rift,* Charlie Kellner created an incredibly engrossing first-person subterranean adventure with strange revelations and fascinating beasties lurking around every corner. The creatures themselves are all great characters, from comical lowly minions to the game's famously impressive dragon guardians. And you don't even want to know what monstrosity awaits you at the end of the final level.

YOOMP!

» **RELEASED:** 2007
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** MARCIN ZUKOWSKI AND TEAM
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** N/A

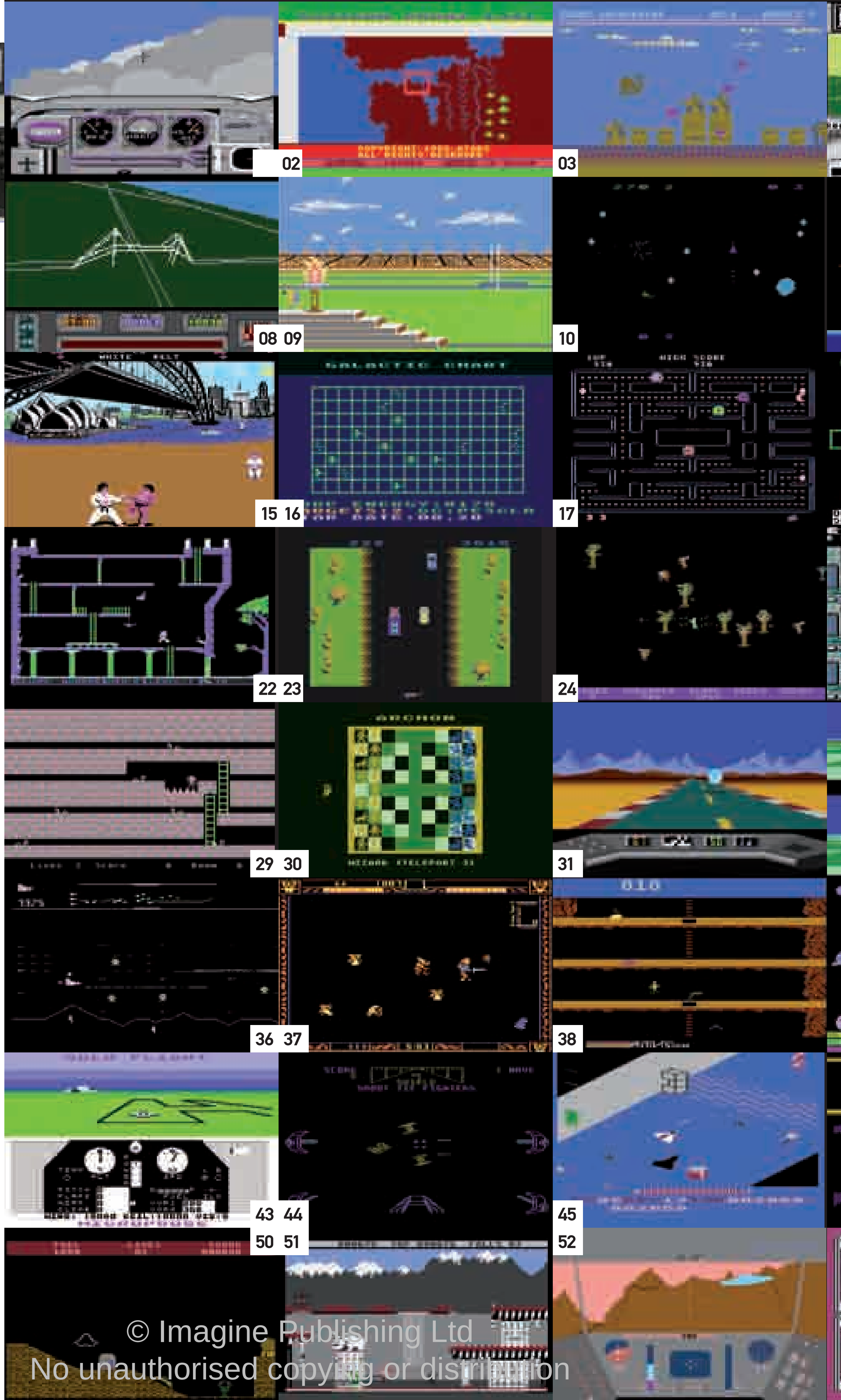
10 Imagine playing *S.T.U.N. Runner* (apparently we're not supposed to mention *Trailblazer*) with a bouncing ball in a psychedelic tubular playing field to a stonking soundtrack. Actually, imagine no more, just grab *Yoomp!* instead. This excellent title was created by a Polish programming team, and was inspired, according to its developers, by an old Bullfrog DOS game called *Tube.* Whatever its influences, however, this freeware masterpiece deserves to be experienced by as many players as possible, which is why we've it's been included here. Fire it up, grab a joystick, disengage your mind from the niggling background music of reality and prepare to enter the zone.



ATARI 800XL and the rest...

With so many British gamers constantly harping on about the ZX Spectrum, CPC 464 and Commodore 64, it's easy to forget that there were plenty of other classic machines that were worth visiting, as this two-page 800XL spread proves

1 ACE OF ACES
2 EASTERN FRONT
3 REVENGE II
4 KORONIS RIFT
5 BOULDER DASH
6 DROPZONE
7 POLE POSITION
8 MERCENARY
9 SUMMER GAMES
10 ASTEROIDS
11 DEMON ATTACK
12 GHOSTBUSTERS
13 ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CAMELS
14 PASTFINDER
15 INTERNATIONAL KARATE
16 STAR RAIDERS
17 PAC-MAN
18 ARCHON II
19 BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK
20 M.U.L.E.
21 RAID OVER MOSCOW
22 CONAN
23 SPYHUNTER
24 NECROMANCER
25 GHOST CHASER
26 BC'S QUEST FOR TIRES
27 THE EIDOLON
28 MR DO!
29 SHAMUS II
30 ARCHON
31 ELEKTRA GLIDE
32 BALLBLAZER
33 SHAMUS
34 THE SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD
35 KARATEKA
36 DEFENDER
37 GREMLINS
38 PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS
39 ASTRO CHASE
40 MINER 2049ER
41 ROBOTRON: 2084
42 GYRUSS
43 SOLO FLIGHT
44 STAR WARS
45 ZAXXON
46 FORT APOCALYPSE
47 ALTERNATE REALITY: THE CITY
48 ENCOUNTER!
49 SPINDIZZY
50 THRUST
51 BRUCE LEE
52 RESCUE ON FRACTALUS!
53 SPY VS SPY
54 THE GOONIES
55 MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE
56 TAPPER




04 05
06
07
11 12
13
14
18 19
20
21
25 26
27
28
32 33
34
35
39 40
41
42
46 47
48
49
53 54
55
56

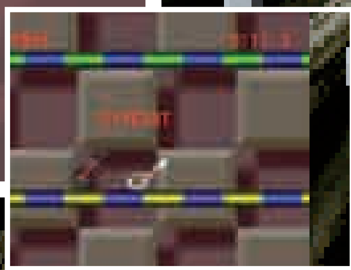


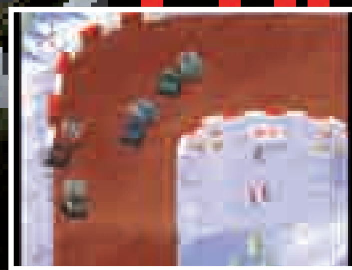
TOP 25 RACERS

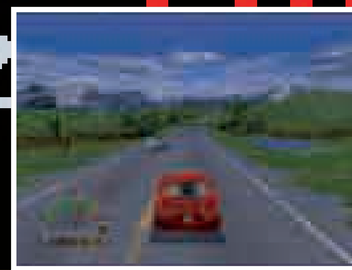
GENTLEMEN (AND GENTLEWOMEN) START YOUR ENGINES. IN THIS ISSUE STUART AND DARRAN LOOK BACK AT SOME OF THE GREATEST RACERS OF ALL TIME AS THEY TAKE YOU THROUGH RETRO GAMER'S TOP 25 RACING GAMES. INCIDENTALLY, THIS ARTICLE READS MUCH BETTER WITH SOME ELECTRONIC J-POP THUMPING IN THE BACKGROUND AND SOMEONE SCREAMING AT YOU WHEN TO TURN THE PAGE



LAP TIME







Unirally

■ **Year:** 1994

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

25

You'd expect the creator of *Lemmings, Grand Theft Auto* and *Space Station Silicon Valley* to put its own unique spin on the racing genre and the excellent *Unirally* certainly didn't disappoint. A dazzlingly fast and frantic racer, *Unirally* put you at the tiny wheel of a unicycle as it sped its way through a variety of crazily designed courses.

Pulling off a selection of jumps and tricks would cause your cycle to pick up speed, while a number of different road surfaces ensured you had to pay close attention to the on-screen action. While some levels required you to simply pull off a set number of stunts to continue, most stages saw you racing hell for leather against the computer (or better yet a human opponent). Fast and frantic, *Unirally* is arguably one of the most exciting racers around. What a pity then that it was only released on the SNES.

Super Skidmarks

■ **Year:** 1995

■ **Publisher:** Guildhall Leisure Services

24

More of a flawless enhancement of the original game than a fully fledged sequel, some people regard Acid Software's superlative *Super Skidmarks* as the best racer released on the Amiga and it's quite clear to see why.

Super Skidmarks took the popular genre of mite-racers, including games such as *Badlands* and *Super Off Road*, and added bags full of personality and then parked them inside a garage brimming with customisation.

If your Amiga had the memory to spare it, 8-player races and caravan pulling were also possible and if you were fortunate enough to own the program disk you could even create your own cars. *Super Skidmarks* is the ultimate jostle racer and one of the most enjoyable games available for the Amiga.

The Need For Speed

■ **Year:** 1994

■ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts Victor

23

***The Need For Speed* franchise is certainly a restless one.** The latest iteration, *ProStreet*, pulls the game into a world of affluent jerks called rhythmic names like Brian Ryan who spend their cash and time bolting big ugly exhausts to their cars and saying things like 'nahmsayin'.

The best version of *Need For Speed*, however, appeared on the 3DO, and benefited from the developing talents of Pioneer Productions. The game doesn't have a narrative and just plants you into a high-spec car with the task of beating the smile off your mouthy rival without getting caught by the fuzz. With a replay mode that lets you edit your own high-speed chase, the game epitomised the good ole law-breaking days of the series and delivered a jewel in the crown for the console.

Formula 1 '97

■ **Year:** 1997

■ **Publisher:** Psygnosis

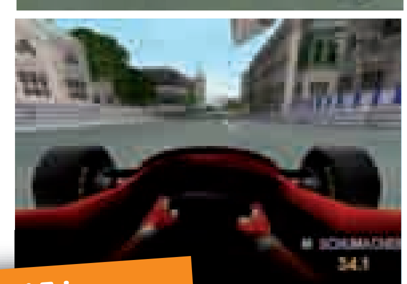
22

Geoff Crammond may have laid the groundwork with his excellent *Grand Prix* series, but for us it's Bizarre Creations' incredibly detailed *Formula 1 '97* that becomes the yardstick that all other *Formula 1* games will be judged by.

While Bizarre Creations' first attempt under Psygnosis was a fine effort, it felt a bit too arcadey and lacked the penalties and flags that fans of the genre craved. *Formula 1 '97* was Bizarre's chance to rectify these niggles and it certainly didn't waste it. A new cockpit camera view gave you a real sense of immersion; Murray Walker received a co-commentator in the form of Martin Brundle, while the tweaking of your car at the beginning of each race gave gear heads something to really sink their teeth into.

Ultimately though, for all the tweaking you can do it's the racing that really stands out, and while some may find it a little arcadey, we think the balance between the two distinctive genres has been handled perfectly.





"FOR US IT'S BIZARRE CREATIONS' INCREDIBLY DETAILED FORMULA 1 '97 THAT BECOMES THE YARDSTICK THAT ALL OTHER FORMULA 1 GAMES WILL BE JUDGED BY"



Lotus Turbo Challenge 2

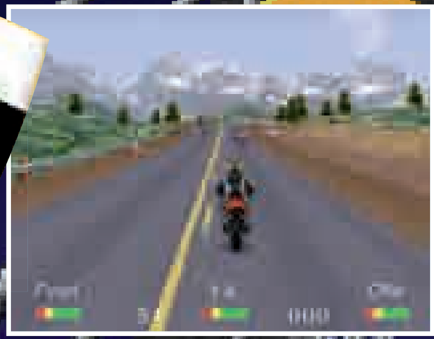
■ Year: 1991

■ Publisher: Gremlin Interactive

21 **The Amiga was home to some truly superb racers.** ***Super Skidmarks*** **and** ***Micro Machines*** **excel as brilliant multiplayer games, but the** ***Lotus Turbo Esprit*** **series, Gremlin's take on the** ***Chase HQ*****-type quasi-3D racer, was one of the finest 'realistic' racers to find a release on the computer.**

Ironically, this second game makes our list for its brilliant multiplayer section. *Lotus 2*, despite watering down the competitive single-player experience of the original by dropping the standings placing for arcadey time-chasing, had some great track designs – the 'Liverpool' traffic-packed-freeway level with the daring truck underpass being a particular standout moment for us. The graphics were sublime, bold and chunky and the Amiga version ran astonishingly smoothly, as the sub-par Mega Drive port would come to highlight.







Road Rash

■ Year: 1994

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts

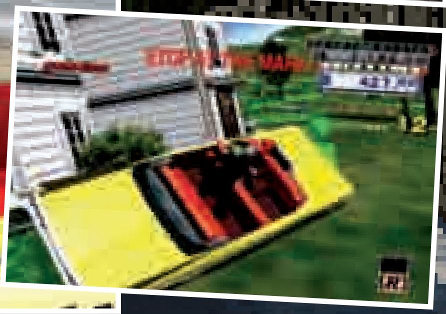
20 **The 3DO was a great console that boasted a wide selection of EA reinventions, two of which find their way onto this list.** For *Road Rash* fans, picking a favourite appears to be a somewhat personal thing. Some will staunchly support the first game for setting the stall, others prefer the sequel for its co-op mode, and some even favour *Road Rash 3*, for its digitised graphics, which, incidentally, borrowed its look from this sublime 3DO version.

Sadly, because of the high asking price of the console, many fans of the series would fail to sample the brilliance of this version. A welcomed gritty realism was injected into the grimy bike racer, with digitised graphics and brilliant between-race bar sections that allowed you to interact with bikers that would try to provoke a reaction from you. Add to this a brilliant rock soundtrack, featuring Soundgarden and Therapy, and the game really succeeded in plonking the player into the boots of a greasy road hog with a penchant for violence and a 'stick it to the man with a bike chain' mentality.









Crazy Taxi

■ Year: 1999

■ Publisher: Sega

19 **It's no secret that** ***Crazy Taxi*** **is simply a mix of old-school points chaser and new-school checkpoint racer, but the fruits of this peculiar marriage are brash, loud and seismic.** Sega's fabled checkpoint racer gets way too much sun in this vibrant game, which takes inspiration from the most expensive method of transport in the world.

The idea for *Crazy Taxi* came to the game's creator, Kenji Kanno, while he was waiting in traffic and thought how great it would be to jump the central reservation and speed the wrong way up the opposite carriageway. With this idea in his head the prolific sandbox taxi-racer was born. Kanno then added a thumping soundtrack, courtesy of bands such as The Offspring and Bad Religion, some nifty stunts and a brilliantly deft element of risk and reward, all of which helped *Crazy Taxi* to become one of Sega's most well-played and popular arcade racers ever released.





Buggy Boy

■ **Year:** 1986

■ **Publisher:** Elite

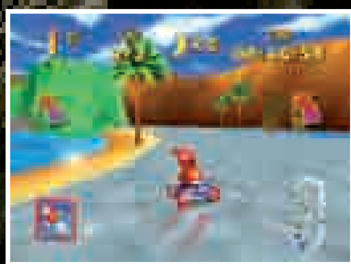
18

Thanks to the fact it's virtually unplayable on the likes of MAME (for research purposes only, of course), it's hardly surprising that many people have forgotten about this classic game developed by Tatsumi. Granted, it boasted some brilliant conversions – you've just got to play the excellent Commodore 64 effort – but there was nothing quite like the original 1986 classic.

With its bold and chunky visuals, its massive cabinet – the three-screen machine was absolutely gigantic – and its finely balanced gameplay, *Buggy Boy* instantly stood apart from its peers and offered a welcome alternative to some of the more conventional racers of the time. It may have come across as just another racer, but riding on two wheels, being able to hit beach balls for bonus points, and launching yourself into the air by running over logs were just a few of the elements that made Tatsumi's racer just so special. There are plenty more reasons to play *Buggy Boy*, but we'll let you discover them for yourself.







Diddy Kong Racing

■ **Year:** 1997

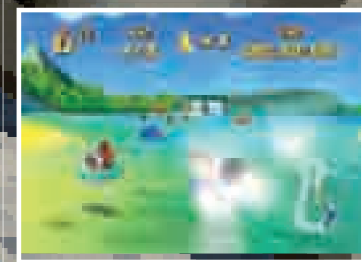
■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

17

After much discussion we decided to boot *Mario Kart 64* out of our prestigious chart and opt for *Diddy* instead. It's not that we're godless heathens or have no taste in games; it's just that in our minds, the original SNES effort and this little doozy from Rare are far superior titles.

While it could be argued that *Mario Kart 64* certainly looked nice, it lacked the sense of ambition that *Diddy Kong* offered and, as a result, felt like a glass of lemonade that had been left to go flat. *Diddy Kong*, on the other hand, bubbled with energy and was a huge contrast to *Mario Kart*'s sterile, by-the-book gameplay.

With its bright and breezy visuals, clever mission structure, different craft – you could also control planes and hovercraft – and varied multiplayer games, the loveable primate's racer left his Italian rival coughing and spluttering on the starting line. Before you start writing in to complain, track down a copy and find out for yourself. You won't regret it.



"ROAD RASH REALLY SUCCEEDED IN PLONKING YOU INTO THE BOOTS OF A GREASY ROAD HOG WITH A PENCHANT FOR VIOLENCE"





Chase HQ

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Taito

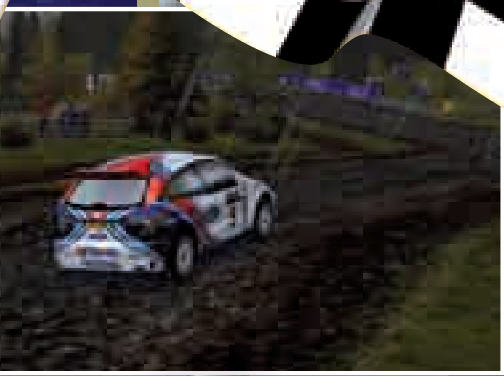
16

Although *APB* came before it, *Chase HQ* really popularised the pursuit genre and then improved on the works of the legendary Yu Suzuki. Taito expanded on *OutRun* by giving the player a virtual hare to chase and smash into a smouldering wreck. Capitalising on the popularity of the buddy cop films of the day, the game's Porsche 928 became as iconic as the Batmobile and the Delorean.

Chase HQ hasn't aged a day and still has the excitement that won it so many fans. It has tons of masterstrokes that play a supporting role in the chase experience: the wonderfully ridiculous names of the perps, like Ralph the Idaho Slasher, the nitros, sexual tension with Nancy, and your nagging partner were all sublime aspects of this iconic racing game. It also happens to be one of the finest 8-bit home computer conversions ever. The Speccy and CPC versions both deserve a mention, with *Your Sinclair* readers even voting the game the greatest Sinclair game of all time.

TOP 25 RACERS







Ridge Racer

Year: 1993

Publisher: Namco

14 **Namco's *Ridge Racer* franchise is still going strong – the seventh iteration was recently released on the PlayStation 3 – but for us, the original arcade racer will always be the benchmark by which all future *Ridge Racer* sequels will continue to be judged.**

Although *Ridge Racer*'s structure feels more than a little archaic these days – as with titles such as *Daytona*, *Scud Race* and *Sega Rally* – it's the phenomenal racing that truly matters. With the exception of the marvellous *OutRun 2* (which is far too new for this **Retro Gamer** top 25 list) and the *Initial D* series, no other racer has ever been able to capture the sheer excitement of power-sliding around corners at ridiculously high speeds.

With its gloriously bright visuals, thumpingly good J-pop tunes and competitive racing, Namco's racer ushered in a new era for driving games, an era that Sega immediately began to dominate. While the original PlayStation port – despite the limited development time – was of an exceptionally high standard, nothing quite beat being able to sit in the Full Scale arcade model – an adapted Eunos Roadster – for the ultimate *Ridge Racer* experience. All together now. 'Riiiiiiiidge Raaaaaaacer!'

Colin McRae 2.0

Year: 2000

Publisher: Codemasters

15 **While the great man is no longer with us, his games live on and this effort is easily the best release that the Scottish rally champion ever put his name to.**

Taking the building blocks from *Colin McRae Rally*, Codemasters built a sequel that took everything that was so great about the original and improved it a thousand-fold. The end result is an incredibly polished game that delivers a thrilling driving experience that Codemasters has rarely been able to recapture since.

Everything about *2.0* screamed class. Videos preceded each race, with a narrator supplying information about each track, menus were slicker, and load times were reduced. The graphics were overhauled and offered more realistic locations and physics. But it was the gameplay that remains so memorable and even now, eight years after its release it remains very enjoyable to play. Every car handles differently, gravel, dirt and snow make a huge difference to your vehicles, while the number of courses on offer is staggering. A great racer that still puts many next-gen efforts to shame.

> "IT MAY LOOK CRUDE, BUT IT'S PLAYABILITY THAT COUNTS, AND STUNT CAR RACER FEATURES THAT IN SPADES"

Stunt Car Racer

Year: 1989

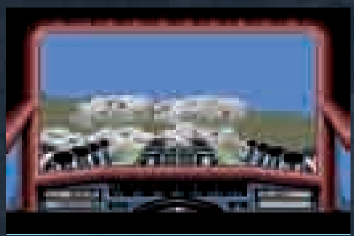
Publisher: MicroProse

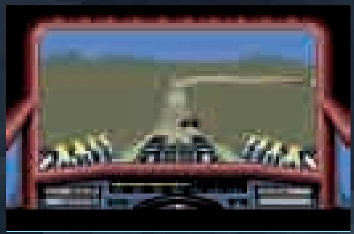
13 **If ever a game was screaming out for a next-gen update it must be Crammond's excellent *Stunt Car Racer*.** With its vertigo-inducing elevated tracks, cleverly constructed courses and excellent physics, it remains in a league of its own, and while many have tried (*Power Drift*, *Stunt Race FX*) they've never been able to actually better it.

For Crammond realism is king, and while we're yet to see an actual stunt car race (the game is set in 2006), the superb sense of scale and the physics fully immerse you and create a believable world that's difficult to escape from. Sure, it looks crude, but it's playability that counts, and *Stunt Car Racer* features that in spades.

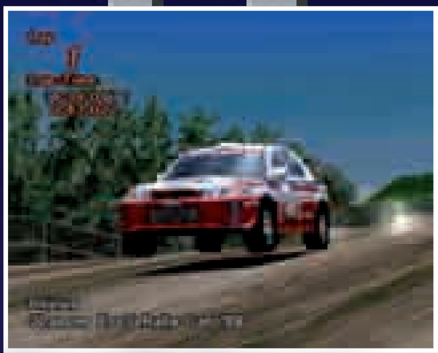
The tracks are very challenging and will take an age to master, the difficulty level of your opponents is perfectly pitched, while the sheer sensation of belting down the equivalent of a ski ramp and launching yourself through the air remains as exciting as ever. A wonderful racer and Crammond's finest hour.















Gran Turismo 2

Year: 1999

Publisher: Sony

12

Polyphony Digital's excellent sequel is rare proof that a game can have both style and substance. It's not without its flaws, and some will argue that the PS2's *A-Spec* is a better game, but there's something about *Gran Turismo 2* that always manages to impress.

The amount of customisation and tweaking is insane, but the excesses go much further. There are over 600 cars, 27 tracks and hundreds of different challenges. Indeed, the number of options available will be intimidating for some, but if you're looking for an in-depth racer you won't find anything better. If you're like us you'll stick with the excellent Arcade mode that boasts a brand new rally section. The beauty of *GT2* though, is that it offers something for everyone, and nine years later, it's still giving.





Micro Machines

Year: 1993

Publisher: Codemasters

11

Codemasters returned to its roots by rekindling the classic top-down racing genre it first made its name with. Despite a somewhat low-key NES release, it would be the later Mega Drive iteration that would prove the natural home for the game. Boasting colourful graphics, a selection of differing chugging mini-motors and a slew of over-sized tracks, the game held a certain nostalgic charm. Add to this the brilliant two-player battle mode that found you nudging your pals off the screen and into a cloud of Road Runner dust and *Micro Machines* can be heralded as one of the finest multiplayer Mega Drive games ever.

As seemed the growing trend with great 16-bit games (*Final Fight Guy*, *Street Fighter II*), developers were seemingly scared to push out full sequels, preferring instead to refine the old and charge £40 for their efforts. Codemasters, however, could be forgiven because the final version of the game to appear on the Mega Drive, *Turbo Tournament '96*, came pressed on a cartridge with two controller ports stamped into it, allowing four-player co-op action without the need of a multitap.

OutRun

Year: 1986

Publisher: Sega

10

We're always amazed when people say they don't like Sega's *OutRun*. Sure, it doesn't quite offer the thrill it used to back in the day and it has since been eclipsed by *OutRun 2* – arguably the greatest racer ever made, although, to reiterate, it's far too new to make this shortlist – but it's still a hell of a lot of fun to play, and for us that's all that really matters.

Even today, *OutRun* retains a personality – rare in a racer – that few other games in the genre are able to match. The glorious-looking graphics, still insanely pretty after all these long years, beautifully composed songs (selectable via the radio) and incredibly slick speed all combine to create an experience that's as enjoyable now as it was back in 1986. Yu Suzuki may have gone a little off the boil in recent years, but back in the mid-Eighties he was arguably king of the arcades, and *OutRun* is quite possibly one of his greatest creations.

If you need further proof, turn it on, select Magical Sound Shower and simply kick back and relax. You can almost feel the wind rushing through your hair.







TOP 25 RACERS



Excitebike 64

■ **Year:** 2000

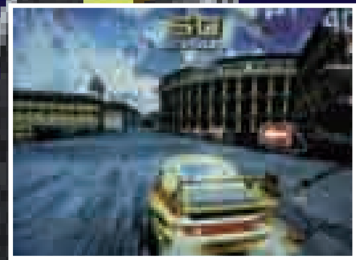
■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

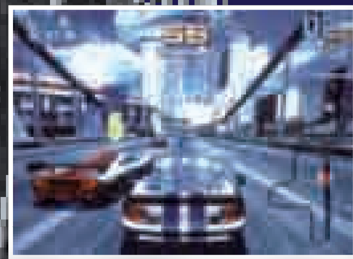
9 **Few remakes have been as successfully realised as the excellent *Excitebike 64*. Indeed, few other racers are able to match the sheer thrill and excitement that playing *Excitebike 64* offers.** You don't just play *Excitebike 64*, you experience it and as soon as one frantic rollercoaster ride is over, you'll find yourself starting your next race.

While it stays true to the core mechanics of the original NES game, Left Field Productions takes the game in lots of exciting new directions. The most notable difference is in the visuals. While there's a fair amount of fog, the design of the bikes and the environments are stunning and perfectly capture the atmosphere of an actual dirt track. Other additions include the ability to perform a selection of stunts and *Excite 3D*, an update of the original game.

Add in a selection of multiplayer options and *Excitebike 64* becomes essential. Here's hoping it's re-released on Nintendo's Virtual Console.







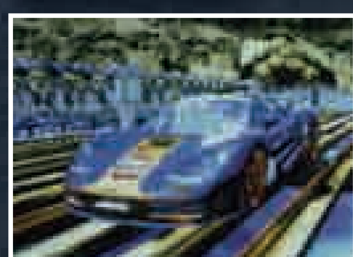
Scud Race aka Sega Super GT

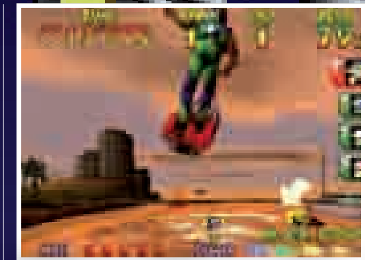
■ **Year:** 1996

■ **Publisher:** Sega

8 ***Scud Race* was a sequel 'in feel' to *Daytona USA* that, sadly, never got the Dreamcast release it was due.** Both games play similarly, with *Daytona*'s solid controls and sublime drifting going some lengths to outclass Namco's *Ridge Racer* series in several departments. For starters, the game's cab allowed your seat to bank into corners, the controls were honed to near arcade-racer perfection and the tracks were whimsically themed – so it's no real surprise that they made a cameo appearance on the Xbox port of *OutRun 2*.

The most staggering thing about this game is how fresh it still plays and looks. *Scud Race* is a beautiful-looking game that gallops forward at a ridiculous pace. It was the first game to run from Sega's Model 3 arcade hardware and is still one of the best looking pieces of code to run from the hardware. Sadly, it's not an easy arcade machine to find any more, so should you ever see one on your travels do yourself a favour and feed it a quid, you won't be sorry.





Wave Race 64

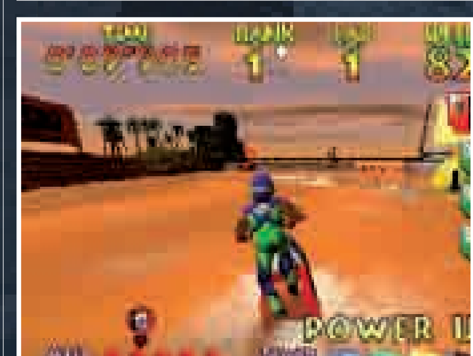
■ **Year:** 1996

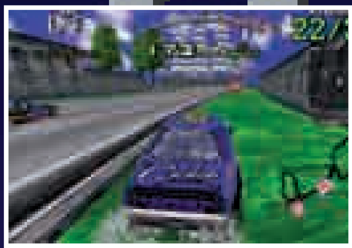
■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

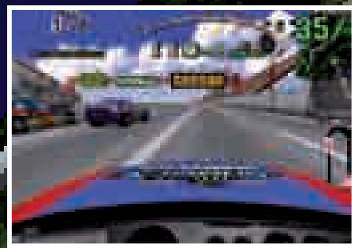
7 ***Wave Race* actually made its debut on the green monochrome waters of the Game Boy in 1992.** But the game would really make a splash when it was ported and updated for the N64. Righting the wrongs of *Mario Kart 64*, Nintendo had created another sublime racer for its console.

The crystal-looking waters, the accurate wave physics and the weather conditions meant the game was a hungry beast, harnessing quite a bit of power from the N64, and it shows. It's technically one of the most impressive games on the console, and the addition of the coloured buoys – which added that all important risk and reward element – allowed for a unique racing experience. It's reputed that it was originally intended to be a futuristic Jet Ski racer, but there was a concern that the game might look and feel too similar to *F-Zero*.









Daytona USA

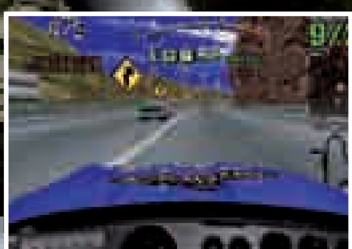
■ **Year:** 1993

■ **Publisher:** Sega

6

Anyone that considers themselves a videogame slot-jockey has to have fed a 50p to *Daytona USA*. This prolific racer marked the first time that 3D arcade-racing graphics got really tasty. The game is no more than a slice of Americana cheese that happens to be a very good muscle racer. It speaks volumes that the game's best and most iconic track has you driving around in a circle, but the tracks were never *Daytona*'s charm.

Its appeal came from its tactile controls, the collisions, competitor scrapes and the affinity and respect you had for your wreck as it punched its way through the pack and wheezed across the finish line like an asthmatic chain-smoker. Sega's ploy was to rip out anything that could hinder the game's fun and for this reason it still remains very popular. It's a Sega classic that battled Namco's *Ridge Racer* in the arcades and marked the beginning of arguably the most exciting developer clash within the arcade industry ever.





WipEout 2097

■ **Year:** 1996

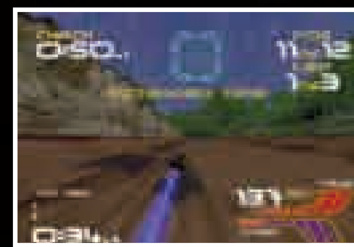
■ **Publisher:** Psygnosis

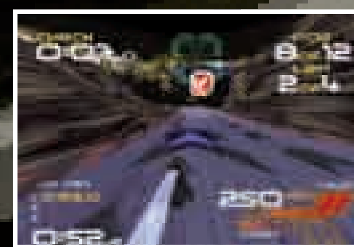
5

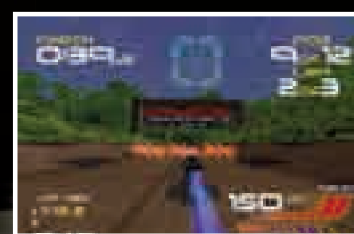
While there's no denying that the original *WipEout* was ground-breaking, it was far from perfect. Luckily, its huge success meant that Psygnosis was soon hard at work on a sequel, and this time the developer managed to fix all the niggles that had appeared in the original.

The number of craft on each track was upped from the original's paltry four to a more impressive 12, while the handling was tighter and smoother and meant that novices didn't spend most of their initial races scraping along the sides of the tracks.

The original roster of bands now included the likes of The Prodigy and Underworld, adding further to the franchise's impact, while several new weapons had been added to the mix. Greatly tweaked, the weapons now enhanced the racing and even new additions like the disruptor – that sent a huge wave of rippling energy down the track – were perfectly balanced. *WipEout 2097*, like *Mario Kart*, expertly blends power-ups and racing to create a very enjoyable racer. How many titles can you say have achieved that?







MSR

■ **Year:** 2000

■ **Publisher:** Sega

4

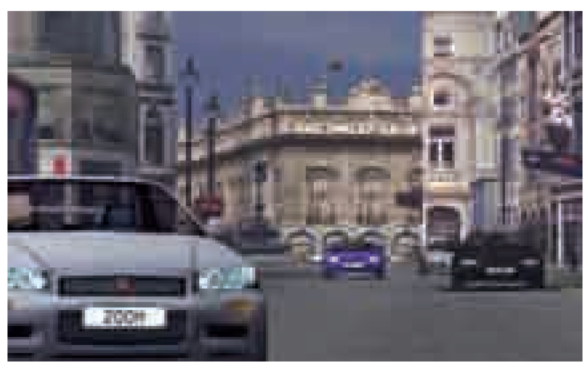
Regardless of whether you feel that a Dreamcast racer is too new to appear in our top 25 or not, there can be no denying that Bizarre Creations' *MSR* is nothing less than a stunning example of the genre. Constantly challenging, full of style and boasting near perfect handling, when you consider that it's taken four *Project Gotham* games to feature everything – and they've still omitted the changes from day to night – the Dreamcast racer becomes even more impressive.

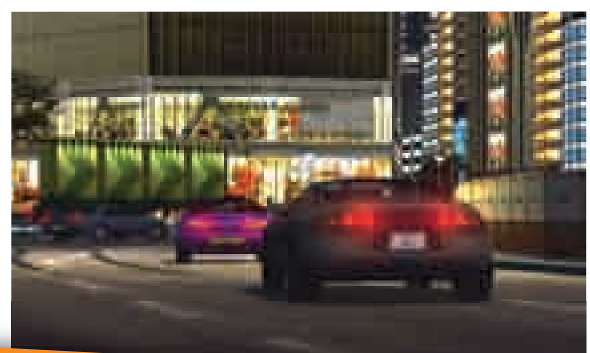
One of *Metropolis Street Racer*'s biggest trump cards was the fact that you could drive around three accurately created cities – London, San Francisco and Tokyo – with the Dreamcast's internal clock successfully aping real-time, while Richard Jacques was drafted in to create music for *MSR*'s nine fictional racing channels.

These elements all combined to create one of the most unique racers around, and that was before you took the excellent Kudos system (which has become a staple part of the *PGR* franchise) into effect.

Completing specific challenges (there are five) would reward you with Kudos points. However, further points were gained for driving with skill – power drifting around corners, completing sections of track without crashing – which added a whole new layer to the already solid gameplay mechanics.

Metropolis Street Racer's unique challenge structure may make it feel like it's more rigid than other racers, but it's actually incredibly refreshing and there's a surprising amount of freedom on offer, with the ability to race around more than 260 tracks – created by simply blocking certain parts of each road – showing just how huge Bizarre Creations' racer actually is. An amazing achievement that Bizarre – or anyone else for that matter – has yet to better.





"DAYTONA'S APPEAL CAME FROM THE AFFINITY AND RESPECT YOU HAD FOR YOUR WRECK AS IT PUNCHED ITS WAY THROUGH THE PACK AND WHEEZED ACROSS THE FINISH LINE LIKE AN ASTHMATIC CHAIN-SMOKER"





Super Mario Kart

■ **Year:** 1992

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

3

Responsible for etching out an entire new genre in one fell swoop, the 'kart racer' seems to have become the natural genre progression for all irreverent videogame characters. The original *Mario Kart* is unarguably the best in the series. It's staggering that the game hasn't been bettered despite an influx of technical muscle flexing over two generations, after all, the game is a relatively simple beast, in racer terms, and all the hard work has really already been done. But perhaps therein lies the problem; the game gets repeatedly messed with?

In the first *Mario Kart*, the power-ups were perfectly balanced, never infringing on the racing or made overly available. The AI was, admittedly, questionable at times, but seemed to suit the game well, and why Nintendo, in its infinite wisdom, decided to oust the shortcut-feathers, pillaging the game of its brilliant element of risk and reward, is beyond us.

Super Mario Kart's sequel, *Mario Kart 64*, was a fuzzy and frustratingly short-lived experience. It took the emphasis away from the racing and steered the game more towards the luck and timing of the power-ups you happened to be holding on your last lap. Add to that the game's shockingly lively rubber-band physics and (if we're brutally honest) what you were left with was quite a tepid little racer.

The early word and look of *Double Dash* initially had us believing that a return to form was on the cards for the series, but we were sadly wrong. The game looked stunning and certainly didn't skimp on tracks, but sadly messed with the formula again by adding a somewhat pointless and distracting tagging system that really added nothing to the racing other than to put further emphasis on the bloody power-ups.

The original *Mario Kart* is the only one to have honed in on the idea of rewards for skilful racing. It was perfectly balanced and had its appeal bolstered tenfold by a staggeringly addictive multiplayer-back end busting with innovative brilliance. If you owned a SNES chances are you owned *Mario Kart*, it's an absolute given. You only have to look at any SNES lot on eBay for proof.



F-Zero X

■ **Year:** 1998

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

2

Oh come on. Only one *F-Zero* was ever going to make it into our top 25 and it certainly wasn't going to be the ageing SNES effort. Nintendo's *F-Zero X* may well be one of the ugliest looking racers to ever appear on a 64-bit console (or any other machine from the same period for that matter) but what it lacks in looks it certainly makes up for in the all important gameplay department.

F-Zero's emphasis has always been about speed and in *F-Zero X* it's handled perfectly. By vastly cutting down the polygons, adding a thick layer of distant fog and stripping away any track-side clutter, Nintendo EAD managed to create a racer that moved at an incredibly slick 60 frames per second. Add in the fact that your futuristic craft is competing against 29 other racers and the end result becomes even more impressive.

Still, it wasn't just the super-slick racing that has helped propel Nintendo's futuristic racer into our top five, it's also down to the fact that the design is just so damned good. Every single track – with the exception of the randomly generated ones on the hidden X Cup – are a thing of beauty, so expertly are they designed. Perfectly created for time trials, you'll find yourself constantly returning to the intricately designed courses, just so you can shave a precious few seconds off your best lap time (there's even the option to race against a staff ghost).

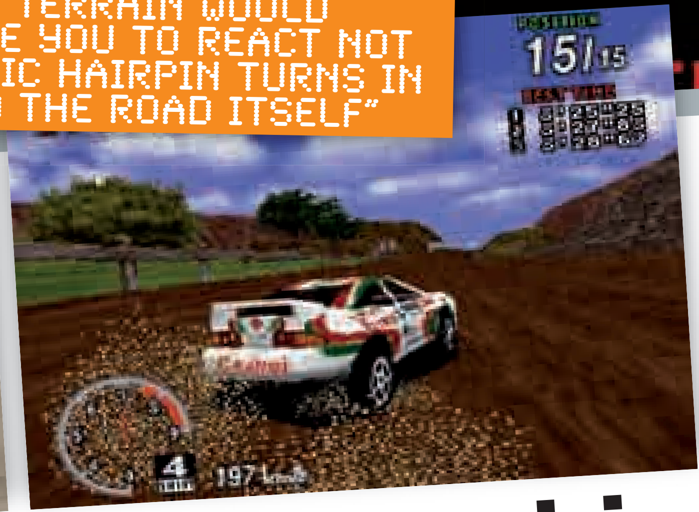
While the energy bar makes a return, Nintendo has tweaked it so that it also doubles up as a way of boosting your craft to even higher speeds. Of course, needlessly boosting dramatically reduces your energy, so great care needs to be taken in order to ensure you'll be able to make your way around the track in one piece. It's a wonderful take on the 'risk and reward' element and it works brilliantly.

And that's the beauty of *F-Zero X*, it might not be doing anything particularly new, but it takes what it does have and polishes it until it shines brighter than any star. By focusing on the gameplay first and foremost, instead of worrying about how pretty everything looked, Nintendo created a racing template that few other developers have managed to match.



"THE VARYING TERRAIN WOULD CONTINUALLY FORCE YOU TO REACT NOT ONLY TO THE CHAOTIC HAIRPIN TURNS IN THE ROAD, BUT TO THE ROAD ITSELF"





Sega Rally Championship

- **Year:** 1995
- **Publisher:** Sega

1

So here we are, first-place podium, the number-one spot. So what is Retro Gamer's top racing game? Astute readers will have spotted that Sega has certainly been the most dominant developer in our list. With the exception of *Manx TT* and *Sega Touring Cars*, almost all of its arcade racers released during its most prevalent arcade period have found mention somewhere in this top 25. Those readers that converse with us on our forum will know that we were toying with the idea of adding *OutRun 2* to the list, but despite it having clear retro-gaming roots we decided it was too new to make an appearance.

Would it have claimed the top spot had we decided to keep it in? Quite possibly. It would have found itself in the top five, that much is certain. There is one game, from a very different series and style of racing all together, that does appear to share a common affinity with that ousted game. *Sega Rally*, like *OutRun 2*, is a game that doesn't bog itself down with bells and whistles, exhaustive amounts of modification and ultra-realistic damage models. Instead it simply sets about provoking the best racing experience possible.

Say what you will about its maltreatment of its consoles, but Sega simply made games machines to show off its games. It didn't polarise videogames around its machines, it built hardware around its videogames. During that early to mid-Nineties period Sega continually turned out arcade brilliance, and despite aggressive arcade mirroring by Namco, Sega retained its arcade dominance and developed a slew of popular arcade hits that would arguably outclass its rival's efforts.

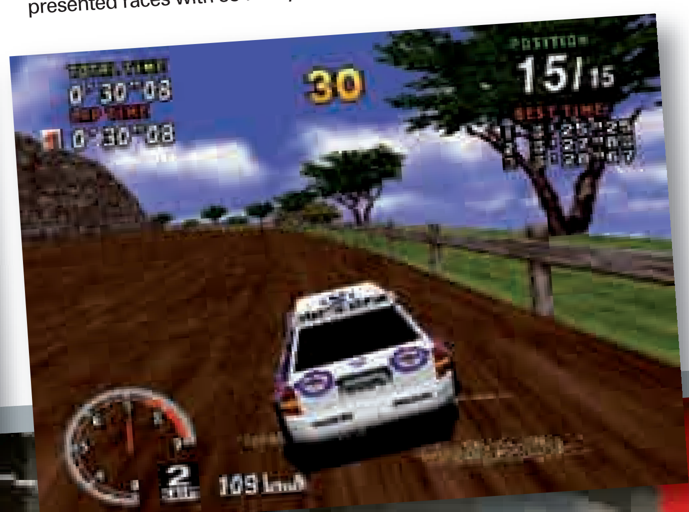
After a wave of early press coverage and screenshots, culminating in interest in the back pages of *CVG*, the game's eventual arrival to our shores caused a massive stir in arcades. The early shots of a white muddied Lancer splashing through brown puddles presented us with an early glimpse of a milestone in the racing genre. With four tracks and three cars the game stripped racing down to the barest of bolts, but that allowed Sega more time and power to refine and polish the experience.

There's a strong feeling of cherry-picked realism throughout all of Sega's racers and *Sega Rally* is no different. Sega had managed to re-create our perception of the sloppy and slushy feel of sliding a rally car across all manner of tracks without the frustrating barrier and collision physics that distracted from the pace of the game. The tracks are the true stars of the show here, bringing to the game a huge amount of replay value – a quality notoriously unheard of in arcade games.

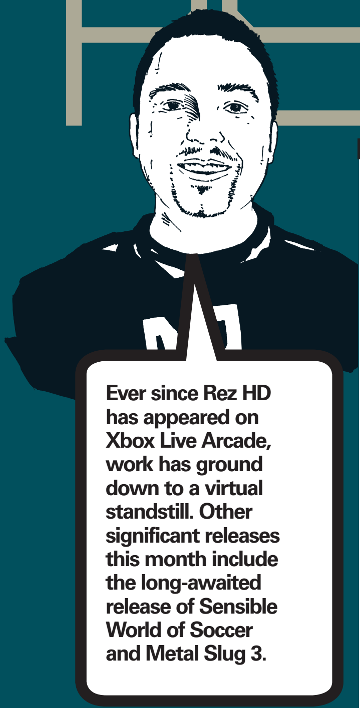
Despite their muggy brown look, the visuals were vividly colourful and the varying terrain would continually force you to react not only to the chaotic hairpin turns in the road, but to the road itself. It would take months to master its tracks, because it presented races with so many differing variables. And Sega would later round the experience off brilliantly by releasing it with one of the most enjoyably tense co-op modes.

The final icing on the cake would be the sublime home conversion by AM3. The Saturn version of *Sega Rally* was truly astounding, a real showcase of the brilliance of the machine. The peerless arcade port would encapsulate everything that was wonderful about the arcade game. The tense two-player dashes, the racing refinement by you as a player to unlock the Stratos and to continually return to it so you could shave a few more seconds off your best time – because you always knew it was possible. Sega has always proven to be the flag bearer of videogame exhilaration – something that is so governing in the racing genre – and *Sega Rally* is perhaps the finest testament to that notion. Would the young rookie, *OutRun 2*, have been able to pip it to the finish line to grab first place? Perhaps, but it's just too close to call.

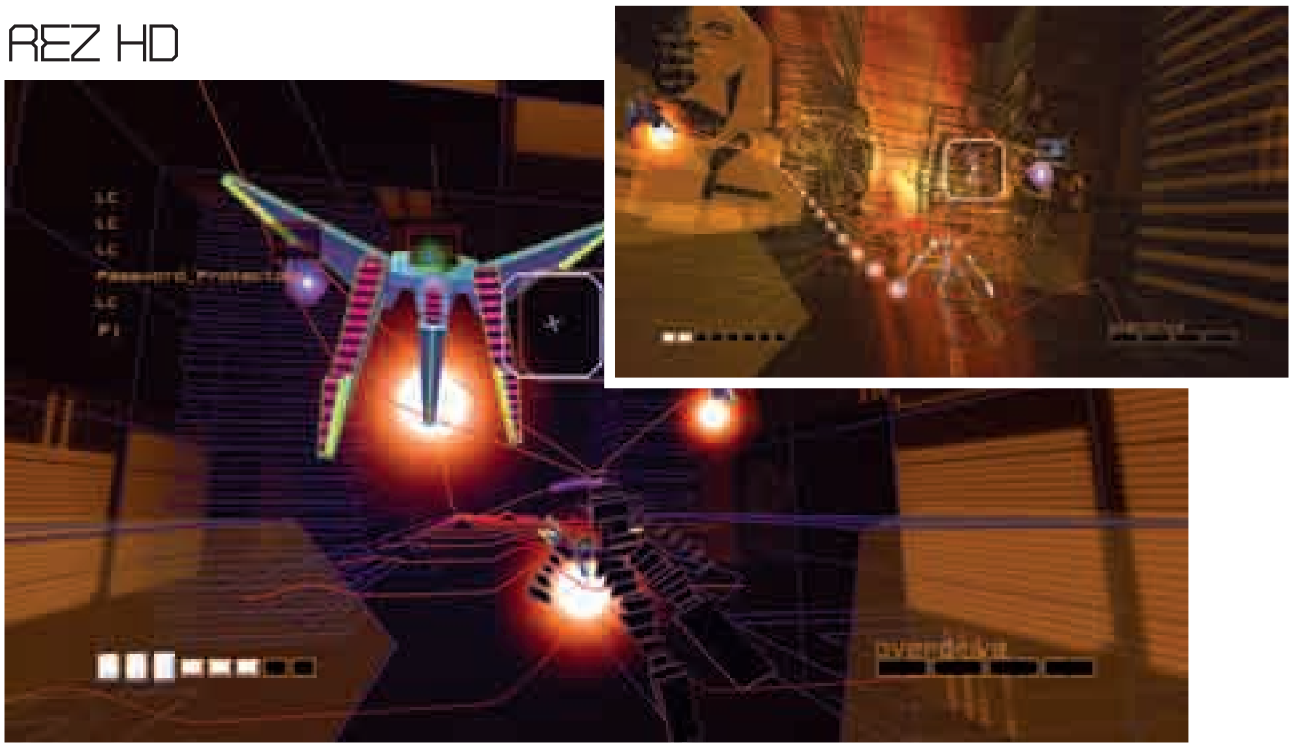




RETRORATED



REZ HD



INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** Q ENTERTAINMENT

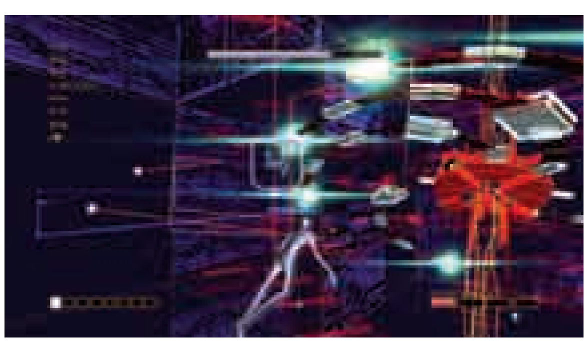
» **COST:** 800 POINTS

Xbox Live is finally coming of age. Jeff Minter's *Space Giraffe* is still regularly played in the office, *Sensible World Of Soccer* is finally here – and every bit as good as we imagined – while classics like *Tempest* and *Yie Ar Kung Fu* are keeping the arcade hits of old alive.

As good as all of the above titles are, none of them, and we mean none of them, can hold a candle to the stunning *Rez*. Tetsuya Mizuguchi's beautifully abstract on-rails shooter has been treated to a high-definition makeover and the end results are truly incredible.

Originally released on Sega's Dreamcast, and later the PlayStation 2, *Rez* initially appears to be nothing more than a simplistic, on-rails shoot-'em-up. Of course, appearances can be very deceiving…

As you float in the ethereal world of *Rez* there appears to be very little going on there. The stage – actually the inside of a giant computer – is almost devoid of landmarks, while enemies are as abstract as the world they inhabit. A very faint thrum can be occasionally felt through the 360's pad; while *Rez*'s much-lauded sound appears to be little more than background noise. Hardly the most impressive of beginnings.





» A great example of *Rez*'s gorgeous graphics and lovely looking levels.

Once you successfully lock on to your first gate – essentially a square box – you slowly begin to appreciate just what Mizuguchi set out to achieve. The screen flickers, a subtle layer of music is added, the world begins to gradually take shape around you and the thrumming in that pad gets… oh, just that little bit more intense. By the time you've reached the first magnificent mayor you'll be absolutely giddy with delight. The once thrumming notes have transformed into a thumping trance soundtrack, the stage is gloriously alive with solid shapes and imagery and that gentle rumble is now so savage that it threatens to knock the pad out of your hand.

It's an intense head trip that has to be experienced to be fully appreciated, and by the time you reach the fifth level – which re-creates the evolution of the world no less – you'll be wondering why you never played it before. Such is the impression that *Rez* leaves on you.



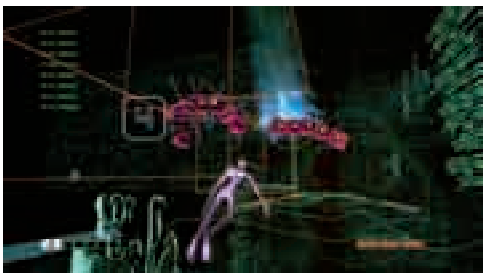
» There have been some brilliant remakes on Xbox Live recently, such as *Space Giraffe* and *Tempest*, but not a single one can compare to *Rez*.



» Beautiful lighting effects really bring *Rez* to life in high definition.

Yes, it's incredibly simplistic to play, and yes, the trance-fuelled soundtrack isn't going to appeal to everyone, but trust us when we say that we can't imagine a better style of music to match *Rez*'s outlandish visuals. Five levels might not sound like much, but it's going to take an age to 100 per cent complete this shooter and there are plenty of decent extras to unlock along the way so longevity is guaranteed.

We'd have happily paid 1,200 points for this, but 800 is an absolute bargain, particularly when you consider the high prices that the Dreamcast version still manages to fetch. All that's left for you to do now is to get hold of the biggest television you can find, close all the curtains, switch of the lights, crank up the sound and lose yourself in one of the most breathtakingly wonderful games that has ever been made.



» Costing just 800 points, it's an absolute bargain that will take your breath away.

PRESENTATION: 90% Clean, simple and amazingly easy to navigate, allowing you to get on with the gaming.

AESTHETICS: 98% Utterly exquisite visuals combine with an amazingly trippy score.

PLAYABILITY: 96% It's incredibly easy to pick up, but will take an age to successfully master.

LONGEVITY: 85% Although there are only five levels, there are plenty of extras available to unlock.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 95% We'd be happy to pay £40. Needless to say, £6 is astounding value for money.

OVERALL: 99% Quite simply one of the greatest games of all time. A virtually flawless masterpiece.

PUZZLE QUEST

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** INFINITE INTERACTIVE

» **COST:** 1,200 POINTS

***Puzzle Quest* may sport one of the highest price tags on Xbox Live Arcade but don't let that put you off. It's an utterly brilliant puzzler that features a surprising amount of RPG elements – levelling up, magic spells, weapons – and makes for an incredibly unique experience.**

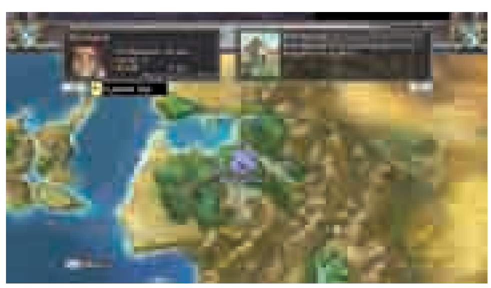
Essentially a new take on *Bejeweled* or *Zoo Keeper*, the difference here is that you and an opponent – anything from a scabby rat to a fearsome giant – actually take turns. Collecting three or more green, red, blue or yellow orbs gives you mana to power spells, while nabbing three or more skulls will immediately damage your opponent. Reduce his life points to zero and you'll gain experience and be able to continue your quest.

What makes *Puzzle Quest* so enjoyable is the amount of choice you're given. It's possible to capture monsters, learn new spells, take over castles and even train certain mythical monsters to become mounts. It's the constant diversions that add immeasurably to *Puzzle Quest*'s core gameplay and you'll soon find that you've lost hours to this fiendishly addictive game.

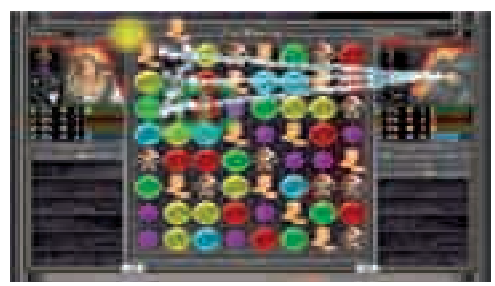
Of course, if you're the sort of person that despises *Zoo Keeper* and *Bejeweled*, then *Puzzle Quest* certainly isn't going to win you over. If, however, you're looking for an interesting take on the two popular puzzlers then you really couldn't hope for a better download. Yes, it's expensive, but believe us, it's worth every single penny.



» *Puzzle Quest* is easy to pick up and follow, with clear menus and instructions.



» It may be generic looking, but it's certainly addictive once you start playing.



» It's expensive, but you'll get lots of play time, and so, your money's worth.

PRESENTATION: 80% Extremely well-designed menus and instructions that are easy to follow.

AESTHETICS: 60% There's some annoyingly monotonous music and the fantasy visuals are generic with a capital G.

PLAYABILITY: 95% Incredibly addictive stuff. Once you start playing it's virtually impossible to stop.

LONGEVITY: 91% It's going to take you ages to level out and there are always new challenges to discover.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 80% It's certainly pricey, but you'll be playing it so much that you'll soon forget about how much you actually paid for it.

OVERALL: 86% A brilliant twist on an already great puzzle game. Let's hope a sequel gets commissioned.

RETRORATED

SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



INFORMATION

- » **DEVELOPER:** KUJU
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS

There really is only one niggle to found in the latest Xbox signing of the greatest football game ever created, and that's playing it will involve starting your football career all over again. Yes, unless you're a massive Sensi fan, chances are many of you will be facing a reasonably long hiatus from the World of Sensible Soccer - and this will certainly spell a hefty disaster for your pride. Think back to the day you were showboating with the game, to a time when you truly knew what it was like to feel like a goal-scoring superstar hero. Well, for many, those days will be long gone. Many will have no doubt hung up their 1mm sized boots and many may have even been signed by the affluence clubs of Konami and EA, so forgive this horrific pun but its true when I say Sensible Soccer truly marks a real return to the grassroots of the sport, and for that reason it might take a little while to get back to fitness again. But re-acclimatising to the brilliant controls and getting the very best out of the game is still utterly worth it though.

Sensible Soccer marks a football game that requires skill to keep the ball up, awareness of space and skilful passing. The game here remains completely unchained - if that's how you want to play it of course. Codemasters have ensured that the original Amiga version of the game and the original squeaky soundtrack have been made available after a bit of tweaking in the Option Screen. This retro look, coincidentally, is reputed to have proved a real laborious labor of love for the developer, as trying to iron out the bugs for this new 360 port meant many of the coders had to dust off their old, probably yellowed, Amigas and try to remember how to program on them again. Yes Sensible Soccer could have probably shipped in time solely in its 'enhanced' spruced up form, but look, you can't beat a nice ole slice of green, unsullied nostalgia, especially when football is involved.

This Amiga version, of course, is the only true way to really play Sensible Soccer, and if you prefer looking at it in any other way than you should seriously take a long hard look at yourself in the mirror and say Candyman five times. While both versions of the game retain the one button kick, lob tackle and the brilliantly simple swerving, the new 'enhanced' version of the game allows for more of the playfield to be seen, and gives you a rather superfluous ripple effect when the ball hits the back of the net.

A smorgasbord of play functions also come packed with the game, including the chance to edit team tactics, teams and construct a brilliant DIY Cup. International, League and Custom Teams are there for bullying around the pitch and the chance to nail down the blinds, get the beers in, laugh at the humorous name variations and go online with your mates for an entire Sensi football weekend marathon. Of course you'll then need to spend the subsequent week trying to rebuild what's left of your waning marriage.



» Take a deep breath and knock it into the back of the net. Easy.



» The enhanced mode is all very well, but veteran gamers will opt for the original Amiga look. We did..

PRESENTATION: 86% The new 'enchanced' mode looks pretty enough and some will probably favor its pitch-perspective.

AESTHETICS: 90% The Amiga mode is enough to cause you to well up. The 'enhanced' mode is rather nice to look at as well.

PLAYABILITY: 94% It's the best football game in the world. Yes, better than Pro Evolution Soccer and Fifa.

LONGEVITY: 87% With the DIY Cup and Xbox live, this game could probably outlive us all.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 75% Roughly six quid for the best football game of all time? If you own a 360 you owe it yourself to grab this now.

OVERALL: 92% It's taken its sweet time getting here but the end result has been well worth the wait. The greatest footy game of all time is back for all to enjoy.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

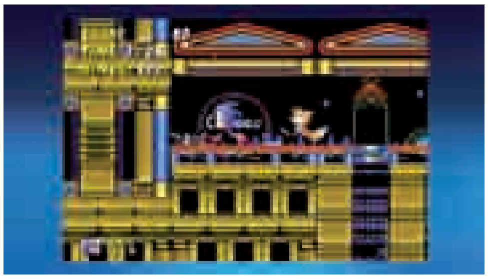
INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** SEGA

» **COST:** 400 POINTS

We've already mentioned quite a few times already that the Mega Drive offering on the Xbox Live Arcade is 100 times better than its Virtual Console counterparts, so let's just jump in to what is arguably the best *Sonic* game of all time.

Everything about *Sonic 2* screams brilliance. The level design is top-notch and allows you to speed through them like a manic or methodically explore them in order to find every last hidden secret. The visuals are still as sharp and bright as ever, while the tunes are typically Sega and will have you grinning like a proverbial loon. Best of all, Sonic still looks like Sonic – and not the weird looking sprite that appeared from *Sonic 3* onwards – and best of all he's brought a friend along for the ride.



» Relive your youth by playing the blue hedgehog's best game.

Granted, he adds very little to the main game, but the addition of Tails means that the two-player races are still as enjoyable as they ever were on the Mega Drive, and, along with those Chaos Emeralds, it is one of the main reasons you'll be constantly returning to this brilliant platformer. His 3D outings may be tepid beyond belief, but download *Sonic 2* and return to a time when playing a game with a blue hedgehog in it was one of the best feelings in the world.



» Your old mate Tails is back to help you out.



» The two-player races will bring you back to *Sonic 2* again and again.



» Here's *Sonic 2* with the lame 'enhanced' mode

PRESENTATION: 75% Pretty much identical to every other Xbox Live Arcade Sega release.

AESTHETICS: 82% The levels look as good as ever, but we're not too impressed with the 'enhanced' smearing effect Sega continues to use.

PLAYABILITY: 94% As good as it ever was, *Sonic 2* was always the best in the series and this release simply reconfirms it.

LONGEVITY: 88% There's not a huge amount of stages, but it's going to take a fair while to collect all of those Chaos Emeralds.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 92% Cheaper than the Wii version and with extras to boot. What more could you ask for?

OVERALL: 89% Still the best Sonic game ever.

TETRIS SPLASH

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** TETRIS ONLINE

» **COST:** 900 POINTS

Regardless of whether you consider *Tetris* to be a true puzzle game or not, there can be no denying that it is one of the most iconic titles in videogame history. As a result of this, it is also one of the most ripped-off titles in videogame history, and this sorry effort from Tetris Online doesn't give us much hope for any future *Tetris* releases.

Essentially designed to try to offload as much downloadable content on to you as possible; *Tetris Splash* is a slow, derivative take on the popular game that includes all of those annoyances from later Tetris games – like being able to continually spin a block around once it has already hit the ground, for example – that were supposed to enhance the original gameplay, but just ended up ruining it.

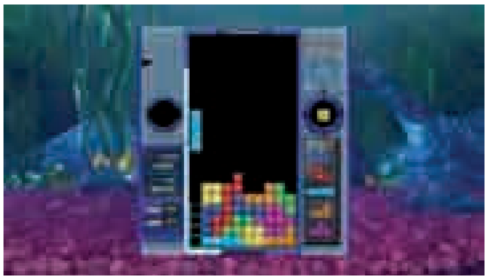
While the single player game is monotonous in the extreme, there is some fun to be had with the various multiplayer modes that are available. Even here though, the gameplay feels strangely laboured and the frantic *Tetris* gameplay of old very rarely shows its head.

If you simply must have *Tetris* on the Xbox 360 then we recommend that you pay the extra tenner and treat yourself to THQ's *Tetris Evolution*. It plays a far better game, and also has online play and sports a ton of achievements for you to unlock. Leave *Splash* to sleep with the fishes.



» The multiplayer games are the best thing about *Tetris Splash*, but, unfortunately, they still aren't good enough to make it a worthwhile purchase.





PRESENTATION: 70% The menus are bright and colourful and everything is extremely easy to navigate.

AESTHETICS: 55% Simple-looking, stylish aesthetics are ruined by some rather ugly skins.

PLAYABILITY: 50% It looks like *Tetris*, it kinda sounds like *Tetris*, but it doesn't really play like *Tetris*.

LONGEVITY: 40% You may get some fun out of multiplayer, but this is truly bad stuff and should be left well alone.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 25% Six pounds does seem reasonable, but the amount of extra content the developer's tried to include is really shocking.

OVERALL: 42% A dull remake that makes us sad.

REVIEW

MYST

MYST IT ON THE PC? NOT TO WORRY, IT'S ON THE DS NOW



- » **SYSTEM:** NINTENDO DS (ALSO AVAILABLE ON PSP)
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** MIDWAY
- » **DEVELOPER:** CYAN WORLDS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



Until the eventual arrival of *The Sims*, *Myst* stood tall as the bestselling PC game of all time. Brøderbund's adventure game was a brave, atmospheric head flip that asked you to meander around a beautifully tranquil island smattered with historical ruins, time-travel elements and futuristic machinery. It was also beautifully bilinear with you completely forlorn, trying to piece together its mystery and your association. With no interaction with other beings – except with the otherworldly brothers Archenar and Sirrus, who are trapped within a pair of books – it's fair to say *Myst* wasn't everybody's cup of tea.

Well, after 14 years, Midway has brought the point-and-click classic to the DS, and with the handheld's stylus you'd think it would be a marriage made in heaven. Unfortunately, despite some laudable tweaks to the game; like an all-new Rime Age to explore, and Cyan Worlds taking the time to rewrite some of the source code, *Myst* simply doesn't work as well as you'd hope it would. Graphically, it's a bit of a letdown and is not really a patch on the PSP port. The main navigational screen looks grainy and using your magnifying glass seems to transform the top screen into a useless mess. Fair enough, the clarity instrument does make the various scribbles on the scraps of paper you discover legible, but what's the point? Why not just make the notes readable in the first place?

The lovely sounds aren't really done justice in this version either. Rather than the clunking sound of clogs, instead, the DS speaker bangs out a cacophony more akin to the whirring of a tumble dryer.

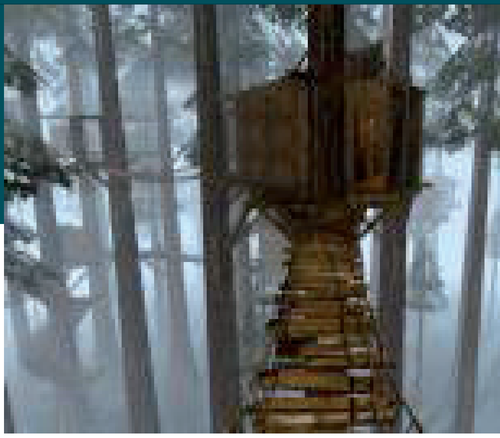
If you're a massive fan of *Myst* we'd still recommend the purchase, but we'll say this; *Myst* is not a game you can play on a bus, on the tube or on a lunch break. It's the videogame equivalent of a book.



OPINION

I've never been a fan of the *Myst* franchise, and while this update boasts several new features it still left me rather cold. If you're the sort of person who finds poring over a screen with a magnifying glass riveting, then by all means pick *Myst* up. Me, I'd rather use one to burn the wings off insects (moths being a particular favourite). It's admittedly atmospheric and the locations have been lovingly rendered, but it's just a little too basic for my tastes. I'd add several huge bosses, a jet plane and swarms of enemies, but then it wouldn't be *Myst*.

Darran Jones



» "Let's go hunt us some Ewoks."



Before playing it, pick your moment, plug in some headphones, cleanse the room of distractions and you'll get the best out of the game. We've completed *Myst* a few times on the PC, and will admit, it has this strange power to wipe the slate clean every time you replay it, almost feeling like you're booting it up for the first time.

IN SUMMARY

Having picked up the game again after a good five years, we must admit we've been sucked in again. Basically, *Myst* doesn't work on the go, which some will argue is the whole essence of portable gaming. However, if you're desperately bored and looking for a game to elope with on one glum Sunday afternoon this should certainly do the trick.

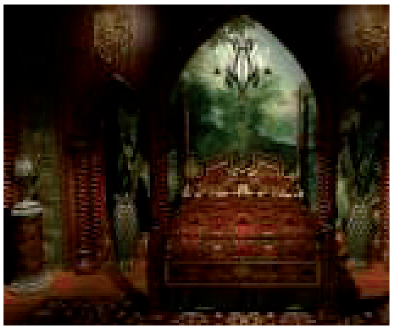
» *Myst* in all its mysterious glory.







» "We're gonna need a bigger bird bath!"



THE SCORES

Presentation **68%**

Not great unfortunately, and as the game is 85 per cent interactive picture book that's a real letdown.

Aesthetics **70%**

It's a hard game to get into on the DS, but lock the door, unplug the phone and you'll get the very best from it.

Playability **80%**

The stylus lends itself well to the nature of the game, but it's far from perfect.

Longevity **84%**

Great game, brilliantly atmospheric and has a knack of feeling as fresh as a daisy every time you play it.

Value for Money **80%**

Despite its age, *Myst* still manages to offer something a little different for DS owners.

Overall **75%**

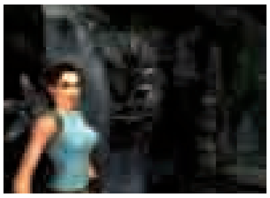
» IT'S HER PARTY AND SHE'LL CRY IF SHE WANTS TO

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY



» You will recognise many of the levels from the original *Tomb Raider* game.

THERE'S TOMBS, RAIDING AND A CLOWN VIDEOING THE PARTY



- » **SYSTEM:** PSP
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** EIDOS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



After a low-key debut on the Saturn, Lara Croft went on to find her natural home on the PlayStation. It was a match made in heaven; a console aimed at testosterone-fuelled pre-pubescent boys, and a game with a leggy, pyramid-titted protagonist and a pervy camera.

That was over ten years ago. Since then we've seen Lara bound around in one brilliant sequel and a swathe of heavy, over-filled tat, before being ripped from the hands of her creator, Core Design, and handed over to Crystal Dynamics. Well, *Legend* was certainly a better than average *Tomb Raider* game, although coming off the back of *Angel Of Darkness* – a nightmarishly weird vision that had us scratching our head as to where the 'tomb' in its title came from – a game about Lara trying to find her car keys inside her stately home would have seemed fantastic.

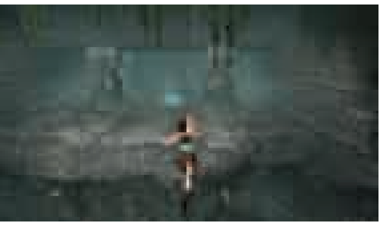
Well, to commemorate Lara's birthday, Crystal Dynamics, with the help of Buzz Monkeys, has decided to go right back to her original tomb-raiding roots. Yes, this is a re-imagining of the first game, not a remake. It tells the same story as before – the search for the Scion for Natla Technologies, the fight with the giant T-Rex and the ending with that huge boss (probably, we never finished it) – but on occasion it likes to add its own spin on the first game. For instance, we get the odd extended sections of previous stages in the game, which have all been redesigned, and we also get to order around *Legend*'s model of Lara – the one with the smooth face. We also get her winch, another carry over from *Legend*, which works brilliantly, and a peculiar but equally cool bullet-time dodge that allows Lara to slow-motion-swerve out of the way of enraged large enemies for a clean head shot and stop those nasty looking bears and angry gorillas in one shot.

Now, while the game is a decent *Tomb Raider* game, it is not without its flaws, stupid annoying flaws, flaws, which, in this genre, are pretty unforgivable. First, the biggest annoyance is the god-awful camera. Right, here is a game that relies on the player to search and manipulate environs continually, so why then have we been blessed with a camera that you can only move left or right, meaning you can pretty much only take in your surroundings at eye level? Of course, there's an FPS gun-draw mode you can access through the D-pad, but this won't help you one iota when you're hanging from a ledge. The second issue we have is how dark everything is. We had to pull the blinds, crank the brightness up on our PSP, and still we found ourselves fumbling around in the darkness like a pensioner in a power cut.

Finally, both of these problems are detrimental to the last issue: the difficulty. This game is a horrible little stop-and-start affair, where progression will be harshly halted because you can't actually sit back and look at where you're supposed to be going. Now, we're not sure whether these problems plague the new console versions of the game – we sincerely want to find out – but on the PSP, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* has its moments of nostalgic brilliance seriously marred by these easily rectifiable issues.



» At times the game can be very dark and difficult to see.



» Lara gets into the swing of things.



» I'm sure I've been this way before…

» The camera is a major problem that makes it difficult to see what's going on around you.



IN SUMMARY

We're now probably all used to pulling Ms Croft through an acrobatic adventure plagued with niggling and probably easily rectifiable gameplay issues. If you're a forgiving fan you'll most likely love this.



OPINION

I was a big fan of *Tomb Raider: Legend*, so I was quite looking forward to this sequel. While there's no denying that this homage is good fun, it suffers somewhat due to its transition to the PSP. It certainly looks lovely, and many of the levels are instantly recognisable if you've ever played the original, but it just feels a little too clunky for my tastes. Not being able to look around your environments without having to rely on your gun is an unnecessary annoyance, while the camera is beyond horrible. Stick with the PS2 version.

Darran Jones

THE SCORES

Presentation **75%**

Looks none too shabby, it has to be said.

Aesthetics **80%**

It certainly has a nice old-school feel to the game.

Playability **60%**

An annoying camera permeates the enjoyment.

Longevity **77%**

A reasonably long adventure, longer than the mini-movie that was *Legend*.

Value for Money **60%**

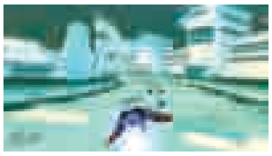
A little too expensive if we're honest. A twenty pound pricepoint would be better.

Overall **68%**

REVIEW

WIPEOUT PULSE

"I'M A FIRE STARTER, A TWISTED FIRE STARTER"



- » **SYSTEM:** PSP
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY
- » **DEVELOPER:** STUDIO LIVERPOOL
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



This Psygnosis-born franchise has always served as a glossier, louder and deeper version of Nintendo's *F-Zero*. It has always favoured shiny ships and cindery dystopian worlds of breakneck speed and clustered tracks. Here, the corny appearance and B-movie sci-fi aesthetics of the Nintendo classic are switched for a more F1-like affair, with differing teams, such as Feisar and AG Systems, of this future world taking the place of the Maclarens and Ferraris of the present. To the *WipEout* fan it will become abundantly clear that nothing of the series has been drastically changed in this latest appendage. In fact, after 12 years it would be fair to say that the game almost feels like it has come full circle. The graphics are glossy; the somewhat subdued speed of the game still goes lengths to occasionally serve up moments of genuine exhilaration and the game still takes time to fully master.

In a similar turn of events to the handling of the series on the PlayStation, it appears to have taken Liverpool Studios a second stab to really iron out those tiny niggling imperfections that we saw in *Pure*. This new iteration of the game seems to get everything right. We get brilliantly designed tracks with that restrained sensation of pace, balance in the power-ups and, crucially, solid and fluid controls – the bread and butter of a good *WipEout* game. *Pulse* is also packed with a plethora of differing play options and a great online ad-hoc multiplayer section that allows you to create and compete in your own events. The main campaign is set over 12 tracks (24 if you consider the mirrored routes) all split into varying different challenges. The events on offer range from the 'Zone' endurance races, where you simply dart around a race track for as long as you can without blowing up, to the 'Elimination' races where the sole aim is to blow everyone into a smouldering triangular chunk. The game also boasts a typically eclectic soundtrack, ranging from the strident acidic techno tunes of Aphex Twin and Kraftwerk to the thudding drum-and-bass beats of DJ Fresh.

What sets *WipEout* apart from almost every other racer is the fact that the player always has to work for their placing. By having tracks strewn with speed-boosting pads the player has to continually keep their wits about them. Winning a race would depend on hitting your marks as much as it did considerate cornering.

While many of the latest additions to the game might feel somewhat superfluous to the racing experience they will certainly appeal to the fans of the game. A new photo mode allows you to take a snapshot of your craft any time during the replay and a new loyalty system rewards you for sticking with teams over the course of the game. If you enjoyed *Pure*, *Pulse* should be an essential purchase; it builds on the series' portable lineage, refines the game and further proves that the PSP is the handheld of choice for the racing genre.

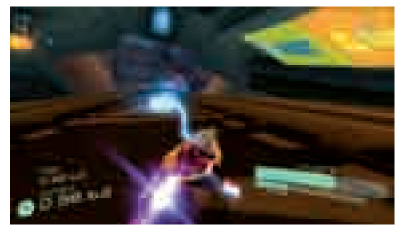
» Even the flame effects look spot-on.







» The tracks look superb, even if they're not the right way up.



» *WipEout Pulse* looks great and plays brilliantly.



OPINION

The *WipEout* series definitely lost its way on the home consoles, but PSP's *Pure* was a wonderful blast of fresh air. Fortunately, *Pulse* carries on the fine addition, and while it doesn't really bring anything new to the table there was so much on it in the first place that it wouldn't have fit anyway. It certainly looks far flashier than the original PSone game, but the same dynamic gameplay lurks underneath. If you're a fan of racers then do yourself a favour and treat yourself to *WipEout Pulse*. You certainly won't be disappointed.

Darran Jones

IN SUMMARY

WipEout Pulse is a solid and loaded PSP racer that fans of the series will be more than happy with. It refines the promise of *Pure* and delivers yet another brilliant nostalgic racing experience to the handheld.

RATING **89%**

THE SCORES

Presentation **85%**

Futuristic-acidic-shiny-happy people all holding hands.

Aesthetics **86%**

Has the wonderful *WipEout* feel of old, and so, it's brilliantly ace.

Playability **89%**

Ships handle very well and the power-ups are sublime, never overbearing the racing.

Longevity **88%**

Plenty of tracks, plenty of ships, a mirror mode and brilliant Wi-Fi multiplayer action.

Value for Money **87%**

Certainly, if you're any sort of *WipEout* fan you won't be disappointed.

Overall **89%**

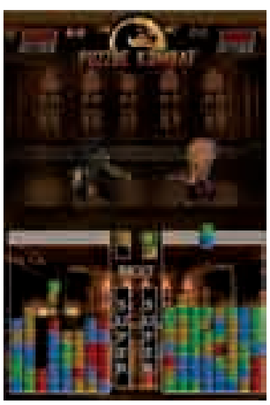
» THIS COULD PROVE FATAL FOR THE FRANCHISE

ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT

UP, DOWN, LEFT RIGHT, HOLD SHOULDER BUTTON, ROTATE D-PAD... BITE BUTTONS OFF



- **SYSTEM:** DS
- **PRICE:** £29.99
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** MIDWAY
- **DEVELOPER:** OTHER OCEAN INTERACTIVE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2



» *Puzzle Kombat* is the best thing about *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*. That says a lot.



Although we're sure that many of you will disagree with us, the truth is, *Mortal Kombat* is not a great fighting game. Even less so when it's compared to such classic franchises as *Street Fighter* and *Virtua Fighter*. Now, while we appreciate the impact the game had on the one-on-one fighting genre, by having the insight to add spraying red sprites, it has to be said that the game is one horribly clunky beast.

The roster of fighters – about seven of them essentially the same one character – move with the agility and grace of badly-dubbed pugilists in a bygone era of kung-fu flicks, and the difficulty of the game has always been notoriously all over the place. Mirror matches are infuriating, endurance matches are exactly what they claim to be and boss matches are always ridiculously ad-hoc affairs, which play out like those grabbing machines that you find at fairgrounds. But what about those infamous 'Fatalities', eh? They were cool. Ah yes, the fatalities, a function so brilliant that only a handful of other videogames – such as *Killer Instinct* and *Primal Rage*, to name a couple – have ever plagiarised. We sincerely doubt that Midway has a patent on the fiddly gory death moves at the end of *Mortal Kombat*'s fights, so perhaps we can attain that fatalities are pants, *Mortal Kombat* is pants and in keeping with tradition, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*, by association, therefore, has to be pants. Of course, sat on the other side of this coin is the fact that if you're a *Mortal Kombat* fan, chances are you will love fatalities and will love *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*.



» Kicking someone in the stomach causes them to haemorrhage gallons of blood, apparently.

There's nothing we can really tell you about *Mortal Kombat* that won't involve sucking eggs. The plausible additions to this portable iteration of the game now mean that the idiotic commands to execute specials, fatalities and 'Babalities', are continually projected onto the top screen for your convenience – but does that make them any easier to pull off? Nope. Particularly because of the cosy button alignment on the DS and the stupid amount of time (if you can actually call it that), you actually contract crippling arthritis in your fingers. Bolstering the game's pull, however, is the added bonus that you get *Puzzle Kombat* in the pack, which is a brilliant and a far better use of your time.

Looking back on the series, portable versions of *Mortal Kombat* have never really been much to shout about (although *Mortal Kombat: Unchained* was a pretty decent stab) and while this version is by no means a classic game, it proves to be another admirable handheld effort for the franchise.



» Character select screen, the most jerk-free section of the entire game – well, save for a few of those characters.



OPINION

Now this is rather disappointing. Midway could have easily included several versions of *Mortal Kombat*, so the inclusion of the – admittedly fun – *Puzzle Kombat* is a little disappointing. It's surprisingly easy to play on the DS and will no doubt please fans of the original, but this seems rather expensive when you can get the same game on Xbox Live for around six quid. Alright, so you can't take it on the bus with you, but that's about all this release has going for it. A cynical package that should have been much better.

Darran Jones

IN SUMMARY

If you're not a fan of the game and for some peculiar reason exchange cash for this, consider yourself a plum. Because if, after 16 years, you still haven't been able to form a cast-iron opinion about this game then you're probably dead inside.

THE SCORES

Presentation **80%**

Having the moves list on display is a neat feature, but would the game have worked better by allowing you to uppercut your opponent into the top DS screen?

Aesthetics **65%**

Not mind-blowing, it has that signature jerky feel to the action, but that's always been *Mortal Kombat*'s style.

Playability **76%**

The cosy DS buttons can make for some smudgy fights, but the *Mortal Kombat* action remains true to form.

Longevity **77%**

Not bad, a tough little frustrating fighter and the addition of *Puzzle Kombat* certainly boosts this game's life.

Value for Money **68%**

If you own a DS and love *Mortal Kombat* it's probably a worthy purchase.

Overall **63%**

HOMEBREW RATED

WE REVEL IN THROWING A MAN OFF A BIKE AT HIGH SPEED, AND ENJOY SOME MARBLE MADNESS-ESQUE NOSTALGIA

FREE RIDER 2

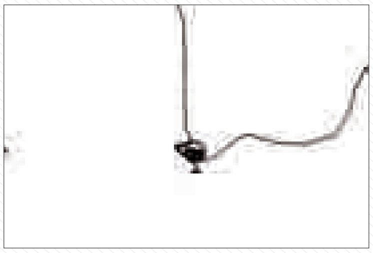
A GAME FULL OF CUNNING STUNTS?



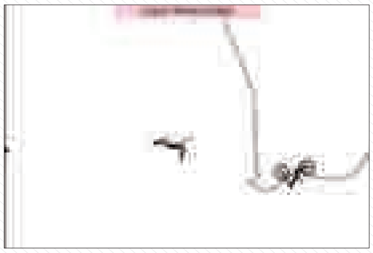
FORMAT: PC WINDOWS
DEVELOPED BY: ONEMORELEVEL
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: WWW.ONEMORELEVEL.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

Infinite longevity is not something that many games (if any) can boast. While *Free Rider 2* might look like the illegitimate child of *Line Rider* and *Excitebike*, if you actually take the time to scratch at its surface, you'll find something actually much deeper. For the *Line/Free Rider* newbie the game essentially consists of drawing a track made up of lines and curves before sending an insanely naive avatar to his satisfyingly painful demise.

Free Rider 2 offers a slightly different take on that idea by giving you complete control over your little man after you've finished constructing your demonically dangerous track. Using the arrow keys on the keyboard, you can make your stick man peddle faster to influence his speed and landing and prevent him from suffering with a rather nasty handlebar circumcision. What this brings to *Free Rider 2*, of course, is an element of skill, which allows the game to break away from being a gimmicky web-toy and to enter the ranks of being an actual computer game, with the 'playing' section of the game coming from the challenge of wanting to keep your man alive until the end of the track is reached and he falls deep into the ether.



» "Please, will someone put a bullet in me."



» Limbs akimbo our little man is about to become one with the floor.

To bolster this thinking onemorelevel.com has also thrown in the option of adding star checkpoints and slow-motion power-ups to add to your track for reclamation. While the look of the game is distinctively rudimentary, it does suit the game's simplicity perfectly. The animations and physics of your bike as it clips a jagged edge and your man lands on his neck and his lifeless limbs are sent flailing are as satisfyingly impressive as they are macabre.

Perhaps our only criticism is that the game's camera is a pig to control. Getting it to show you the last piece of track that you've laid is more frustrating than you feel it should be. Gripe aside, *Free Rider 2* appears to have an infinite amount of life in it, and if the vast online following is anything to go by, a plenty load of fans as well.

PRESENTATION: 79% Okay, admittedly, it's not much to look at – but its intentionally sparse look fits the game.
AESTHETICS: 35% Sheet of paper + ballpoint pen = *Free Rider*.
PLAYABILITY: 90% Designing perilous tracks and forcing a little man on a bike to peddle, fly, spin and crash through them – very playable.
LONGEVITY: 93% It would be fair to say that *Free Rider 2* is infinite.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A
OVERALL: 85%

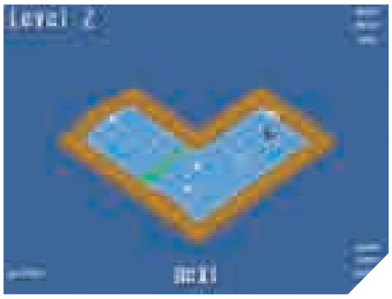
CONTOUR

MARBLE MADNESS, WELL SORT OF



FORMAT: PC WINDOWS
DEVELOPED BY: SEAN HAWKE
LINK: WWW.JAYISGAMES.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

Sean Hawke's *Contour* is a quirky little puzzle game that puts a new spin on an old classic. The classic having a facelift, graphically and gameplay-wise, this time out is Atari's *Marble Madness*. *Contour* is a similar game to the 8-bit classic, but with the main difference being that instead of controlling the marble, you get to manipulate the level. Yes, by pinching at the isometric floor and raising the area around the marble you must shepherd the ball around the pitfalls and park it inside the goal.



» This level's incredibly easy.

To spice things up the levels later introduce a number of different coloured tiles that will affect your ball in different ways. The green tiles, for instance, will accelerate your ball, while the red ones will slow it down. And there are also teleportation tiles to help you jump huge gaps in the level. The game also comes packed with a neat little level editor that allows you to construct your very own 'screwball scramble' and see if your mates and co-workers have got the dexterity and patience to see the ball to its home.

The game is basically a rather peculiar take on the ancient wooden labyrinth games that you may or may not have played as a child. It's a brilliantly addictive puzzle game that holds a great deal of nostalgic charm, and with plenty of challenging levels to work your way through and a nifty easy-to-pick-up level editor there's not a lot we don't like about the game. If you're looking for a neat little puzzle game to while away an hour or two, then *Contour* will certainly get the ball rolling.



» This game plays like *Marble Madness* meet crazy golf.



» The nifty level editor allows you make your own taxing signature stages for your friends.

PRESENTATION: 86% Gives a nice clinical look at proceedings.
AESTHETICS: 88% It has a neat *Marble Madness* vibe to it.
PLAYABILITY: 86% Easy to grasp, easy to control, an easy 86% then.
LONGEVITY: 85% Some of the latter stages can be taxing, so life it certainly offers.
VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A It's free, so it offers great value.
OVERALL: 85%

WE TRACK DOWN Q*BERT GETTING UP TO NO GOOD WITH JACK FROST IN A QUIRKY, BUT NOT TOO CHALLENGING, PLATFORMER

JACK FROST

FROST VS BERT

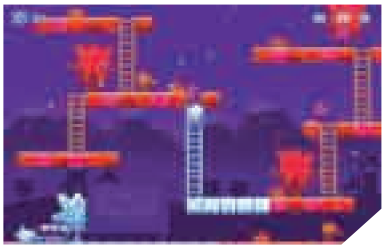
FORMAT: PC WINDOWS
DEVELOPED BY: NITROME
LINK: WWW.NITROME.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT



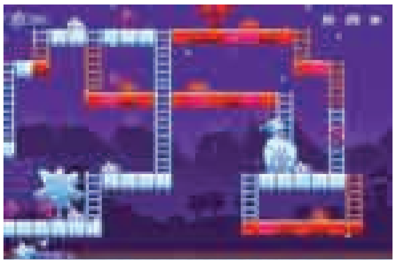
Whatever happened to Q*bert, the hopping ball of nostril? Well, we've found the little blighter – he's been trundling along the icy platforms of the Arctic, catching a nasty cold and trying to inflict death on poor old Jack Frost. Yes, for whatever reason, these guys simply cannot stand one another. Who's in the right and who's in the wrong is anyone's guess. The evidence presented to us is that Jack has a menacing glint in his eye, is spiky and is intent on turning the entire planet into the set of *The Day After Tomorrow*, whereas Q*bert, or Q*berts (as there are many), are simply minding their business, walking up and down, off their heads like they've just been the victims of a train crash.

Well, in this one or two player platform romp, we get to play as Jack Frost, as he embarks on a journey to mark his territory and spray his icy scent all over the planet. To complete each stage you must coat the entire level in ice by walking across every section of the floor and climbing up all of the ladders. Bonus points can be earned by collecting all of the hovering snowflakes that are darted around the screen, but they're not vital to progressing through the game, and this exposes the biggest flaw in the game: it's just way too easy. If you consider yourself any kind of platform-game expert then the game will feel like killing a snowman with a samurai sword. In true platform-game manner, to put a stop to the weary looking Berts all you have to do is simply jump on the top of their heads to temporarily freeze them inside a block of ice and, therefore, spoil any real challenge that *Jack Frost* has the potential to offer.

With brilliantly bright and chunky-looking, Amiga-feeling graphics, this is another wonderful looking game from Nitrome. While,



» "Hey, Frost, you're not looking up girl's skirts are you?"



» Jumping on foes encases them inside an ice prison.

admittedly, we didn't have as much fun with *Jack Frost* as we did with *Twang* (reviewed in issue 46), *Jack Frost* is an enjoyable enough game with enough here to keep any platform-game fan amused. However, if you are looking for a real challenge in a platform game, it's probably best to look elsewhere.

PRESENTATION: 85% Well presented, fantastically colourful and bursting with character.

AESTHETICS: 80% Feels like an old-school Amiga coverdisk game.

PLAYABILITY: 75% Very playable and brilliantly quirky, an enjoyable little platform romp.

LONGEVITY: 50% Platform pros will probably breeze through it.

VALUE FOR MONEY: N/A

OVERALL: 78%



BURNING FORCE

DIDN'T BURN A HOLE IN OUR WALLET



- **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW POUNDS



HISTORY

We've all had a few costly import horror stories in our lives. We spent £65 on the Japanese version of *Yoshi's Story* on the N64, not a bad game, but a shade more problematic than you feel it should be for the bilingual lacking.

We also paid silly money for a US copy of *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero* – a game so bad that we feel duty-bound to tell you about it. There were, however, some import titles that were well worth fumbling around the option screen like a geriatric trying to start a boiler… and worthy of the cash, too. *Star Fox* and the Japanese version of *Street Fighter II Turbo* were great investments. For our Mega Drives though, we imported far less games. But one game we did pick up for the machine, and quite cheaply, was this neat little scrolling shooter by Namco.

Burning Force was a kind of first-cum-third-person scrolling blaster in the vein of *Space Harrier* that was ported from one of Namco's early arcade games. Truthfully, it's probably not as good as Sega's arcade smash, but it was still a lot of fun. It also boasts one of the finest soundtracks to bestow the console. Every level thrashed out a guitar cacophony that really got the old adrenaline pumping. Despite its bright, stark colours scaling at you with all the subtlety of being hit by a bus full of hippies, the game looked good, too.

Starting out on a hover-bike, your avatar, Hiromi, had to negotiate treacherous stretches of land rammed with bullet-spewing mechs and flying nasties. Each level was split into three 'main' acts, before a *Pilotwings*-style bonus stage that saw you flying through hoops trying to obtain much needed extra lives. On the last battle level of each act, your bike would get sucked into a mother ship where it was kitted out with some nifty upgrades – allowing it to take to the sky – and shown the sweet spots on the bosses.

Burning Force wasn't trying to reinvent the wheel; heck, it wasn't even a staggeringly great game, but it was certainly one of the better games we've bought on import – it was no *Mythologies*, it has to be said.


80000
MISSILE

BARGAIN HUNT

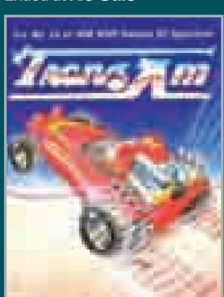
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. This month we look at some of Rare's Spectrum back catalogue

TRANZ AM
Normally sells for £3
Ended at **No Sale**



JETPAC
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£8.23**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



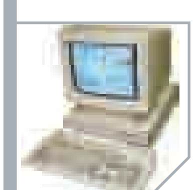
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released.
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



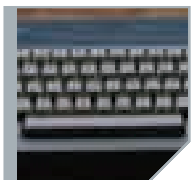
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

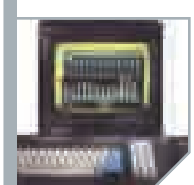
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor.



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($165+)**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**

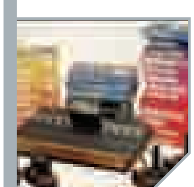
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

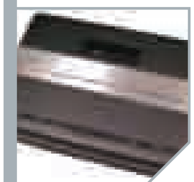
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

★★★★★ ROCKING HORSE SHIT
★★★★ HEN'S TEETH
★★★ LUCKY FIND
★★ EBAY REGULAR
★ CAR-BOOT SALE BARGAIN



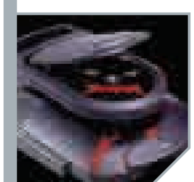
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

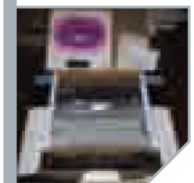


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

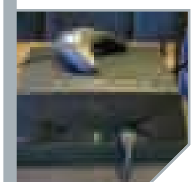
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA 500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the bestselling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

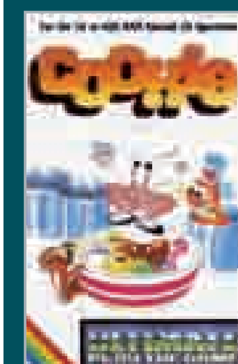


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

ALIEN 8
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£3.56**



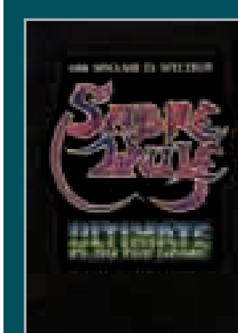
COOKIE
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **£4.78**



GUNFRIGHT
Normally sells for **£1**
Ended at **No Sale**



SABRE WULF
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£19.48**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32

» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.

- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**

The computer that established the Commodore brand.

- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!

- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE

» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.

- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…

- HD REVIEW - ISSUE 2
- GAMESTM - ISSUE 54
- X360 - ISSUE 16



CASIO LOOPY

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

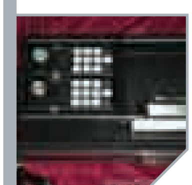
More insanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio had hoped it would do better than its PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F

» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).

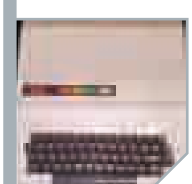


COLECOVISION

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**

Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.

- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64

» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.

- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Failed console by Emerson that had numerous different clones released, as well.

- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION

» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.

- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY

» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act. Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.

- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**

After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.

- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.

- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION

» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM

» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.

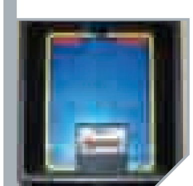
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)

» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Series of old computers by Tomy.

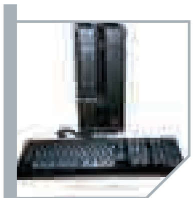


VECTREX (MB/GCE)

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.

- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

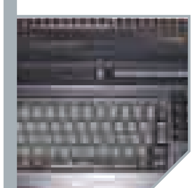
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

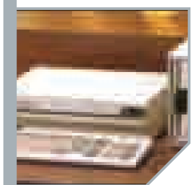
NEC



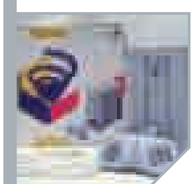
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN



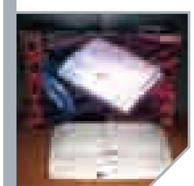
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PC-E and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PC-E DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PC-E/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

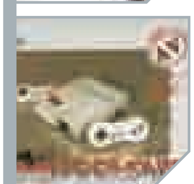


DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PC-E Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!

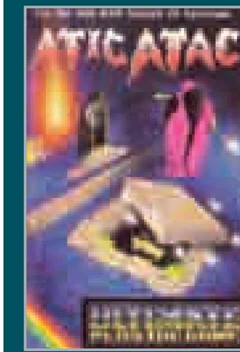


FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

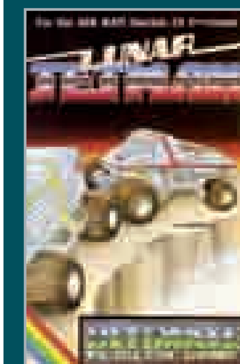


FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

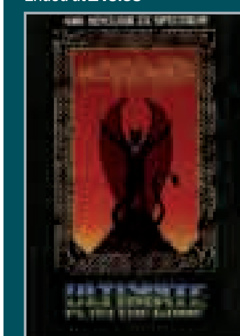
ATIC ATAC
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **£6.03**



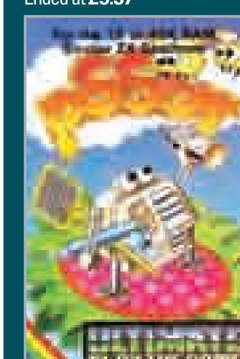
LUNAR JETMAN
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **No Sale**

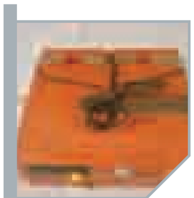


UNDERWURLDE
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£15.83**



PSSST
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **£5.37**

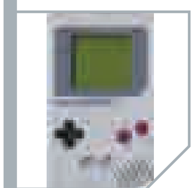




SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



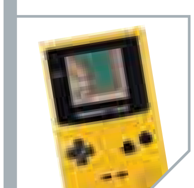
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



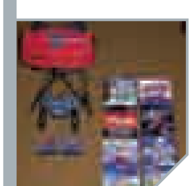
NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



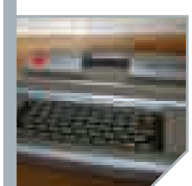
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



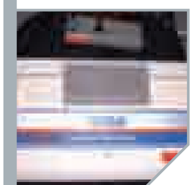
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



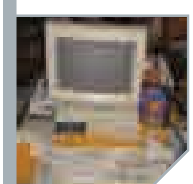
SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history. The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad

hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



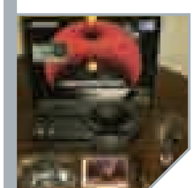
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.



GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.
- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.
- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD

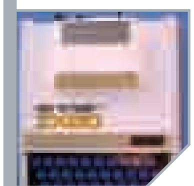


PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.
- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR



ZX80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX80, but still commands a respectable price.
- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

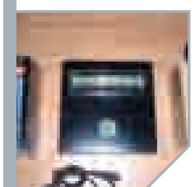


ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.
- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



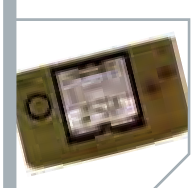
NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)
- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR



NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.
- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG

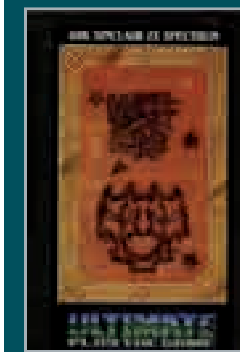


NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

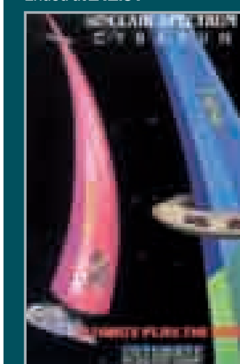


NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

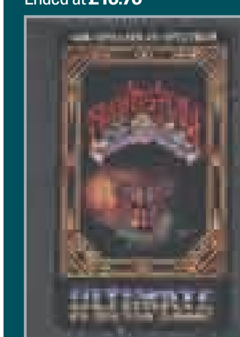
KNIGHT LORE
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£18.87**



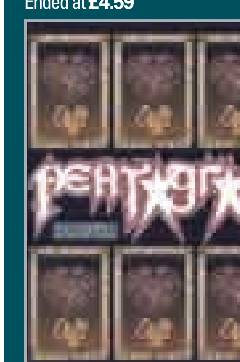
CYBERUN
Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **£12.51**



NIGHT SHADE
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£16.76**



PENTAGRAM
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£4.59**



RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO MICHAEL FRASER ABOUT HIS AMUSING SPECTRUM TRIBUTE SITE, THE RUBBER BEERMAT.

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site that's dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site that covers every single machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
An arcade forum that caters for an Australian audience. There's plenty of topics to engage in and some knowledgable members.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews, an excellent and friendly forum and lots of pretty screenshots.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
Brilliant Amiga website run by Kim Lemon, the owner of the excellent Lemon 64.

THE MEAN MACHINES ARCHIVE DEEPER LOOK
www.neo-geo.com
Although widely dedicated to SNK's wondrous AES and MVS systems, there's plenty of different coverage to enjoy.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org
Largely dedicated to the latest import games, but there's an informative retro section with advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you thought the Atari 2600 was ancient then you may want to visit this website. Expect a feature on obscure computers very, very soon.

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but don't let that put you off visiting. It's a lot of fun and boasts a bubbly forum.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net/
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega, as there are tons of fantastic Sega tunes to listen to.



Retro Gamer - When did you set The Rubber Beermat up?

Michael Fraser - TRB was an offshoot from my first games site, the hideously named "Michael's World of Interactive Entertainment". That was in 2000, with the intention of reviewing games and apps for a variety of machines including the Spectrum. After a couple of years doing that, I was finding it difficult to maintain the site and have a real life, so I decided to focus on the Spectrum games side of things. TRB officially came into existence on 20 August 2002 and has run ever since.

RG - Why did you base it on the Spectrum?

MF - The Speccy was my first computer and I was captivated with the machine ever since I first saw *The Hobbit* running on my cousin's machine back in 1983. I hadn't stopped buying and playing Spectrum games throughout the Eighties and Nineties, right up until the last issue of *Ys*. As I was a wannabe games reviewer I thought I'd concentrate on the machine that I got the most enjoyment out of. So the Spectrum won.

RG - What gives The Rubber Beermat the edge over similar websites?

MF - I'd say the content. Looking at it objectively, there are over 150 reviews, which offer a reference guide to the quality of a game if you need one. I've also got the Top 100 listing, which is due for an update this year and there's a big section on crap games. I really enjoy producing TRB, which I hope shows in the reviews. The site gets updated reasonably frequently, which also helps.

RG - How do readers tend to respond to your reviews?

MF - Mostly positive. I don't get many direct comments but there have been some on the WoS forum. I've had one comment, which, correctly pointed out that the review text didn't match up with the end scores, which I amended, though that's been a one-off. I won't automatically give a once-raved game a high score, just because it's *Knight Lore*, for example. If I think a game is good (or bad) then I'll let that come across in the review. I try to be as fair as possible, even though I do enjoy a good rant.

RG - What's the most popular part of the website?

MF - The Top 100's been the most popular, by far. It even got a mention in a Brazilian gamer's blog, which impressed me. The Awards section is the next popular. A few people have commented about the ZX25 anniversary feature. This was good for me, as I really enjoyed putting it together, even if I did leave it until the last minute to create it.

RG - How can our readers contribute to the site?

MF - There's a whole load of info on the Contact section of the site, including a review guidelines PDF that hopefully answers a lot of questions. I've only received four external reviews since the site opened, so it'd be great to see some more.

> "IF I THINK A GAME IS GOOD THEN I'LL LET THAT COME ACROSS IN THE REVIEW. I TRY TO BE FAIR, BUT I DO ENJOY A GOOD RANT"

RG - How did readers respond when they realised *Manic Miner* or *Jet Set Willy* hadn't made it into the top ten?

MF - Heh heh heh. They didn't. To my knowledge, it was yourselves in **Retro Gamer** who were the only commentators on *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*'s non-appearance in the 2006 Top 100. When I was compiling that listing, I hadn't played either game in a long time, so they got ignored. *Manic Miner*'s now been recently played and reviewed, so it may make an appearance this year.

DEEPER LOOK - WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

The Rubber Beermat
http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/themanor33/TRBv2/

It's a relatively new site – it was first established in 2002 – but don't let that put you off as The Rubber Beermat is a cracking little site that deserves to be visited by anyone with a love for Sir Clive's machine. While it doesn't feature a forum of any sort, it does boast over a hundred entertaining reviews, a unique awards section – awards range from 'Good idea, but extremely dull' to 'Biggest Pile of Crap on a Covertape' – and a brave top hundred with no mention of *Jet Set Willy* or *Manic Miner*. If you're looking for a site that doesn't take itself too seriously and loves the ZX Spectrum then there really is no need to look any further than The Rubber Beermat.



THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that gives an exhaustive look at the US game's market courtesy of Shane Monroe.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
While it features the latest games, there's also a retro section filled with informative members. The Pickford brothers are also moderators.

SHOOT THE CORE
http://shootthecore.moonpod.com
Excellent site that loves shmups of all kinds. There are plenty of homebrew efforts to download too, so there's always something to blast.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
While there's plenty of Sega love here, System16 is also dedicated to covering as many different arcade games as possible.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
This great site has everything. Screenshots, game endings, cover scans, reviews. It's all here and all good.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Run by **Retro Gamer**'s very own Damien McFerran, this is your reference point for anything Virtual Console related.

MAC RETRO
http://www.macretro.tk/
Brilliant site that's dedicated to getting emulators running on a Mac. There's plenty of info and it's all easy to follow.

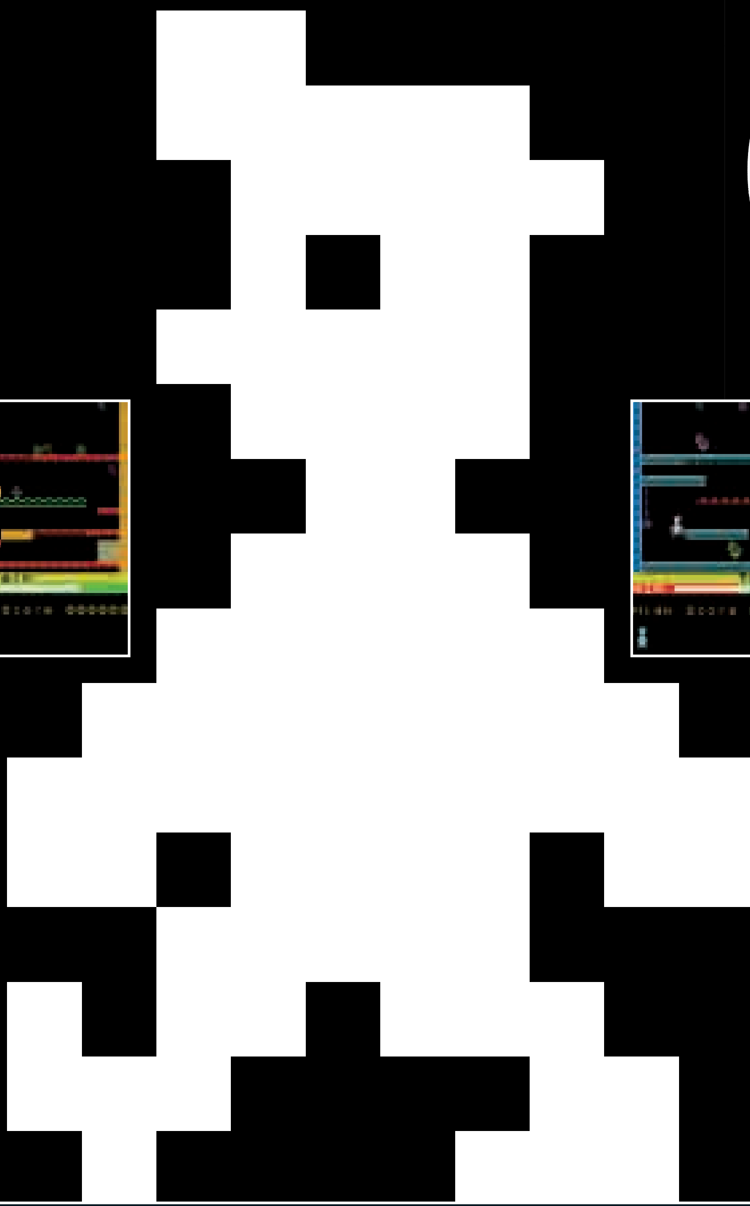
WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum and plenty of legal Java-based Spectrum games to enjoy.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk

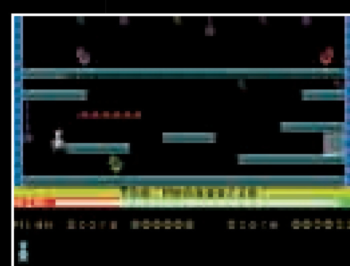
IT'S OUR SPECTRUM SPECIAL*

THE MAKING OF… MANIC MINER

ALMOST EVERY SPECTRUM OWNER HAS PLAYED MATTHEW SMITH'S EXCELLENT PLATFORMER, BUT HOW DID HE PUT THE 20-SCREEN MASTERPIECE TOGETHER? PAUL DRURY TRACKS DOWN THE ELUSIVE CODER AND GETS SOME ANSWERS







MORE EXCITING SPECTRUM FEATURES…

- Martyn Carroll takes an in-depth look at the Spectrum 128K and finds out what happened to all that extra memory
- When you get hold of a coding legend like Matthew Smith, you don't let him leave easily. Discover how he started in the industry and what he's up to now
- You can't have a Spectrum special without paying tribute to its best games, so expect an in-depth look at the 25 titles you must own for Sir Clive's machine

LOAD 48 NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 28 FEB 2008

* DON'T WORRY, THERE'LL STILL BE PLENTY OF OTHER 8-BIT AND 16-BIT GOODNESS

END/GAME



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: TOWER OF DOOM

Maybe it's because they're undead wizards, but Liches always think that they can take over the world. Fortunately, a band of plucky adventurers are on hand to teach Tower Of Doom's bad guy a lesson.



SCREEN 1

There are some particularly vicious bosses to defeat in *Tower Of Doom*, but the insidious Mud Golem near the end is arguably one of the toughest mayors you'll face. He's just a warm-up to the main event, though, so it's best to finish him off quickly.



SCREEN 2

If you're geeky like us (well, Darran), you'll know that Liches are one of the toughest adversaries you can face in *D&D* and this one is no different. Armed with an arsenal of deadly spells, he keeps summoning ghouls and causes no end of trouble.



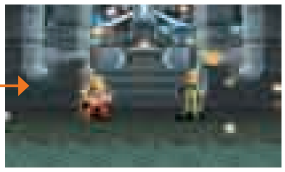
SCREEN 3

This Lich may be tough, but that doesn't stop your team of adventurers from beating him back to the grave. As the doomed undead wizard screams violently in protest, the tower begins to shudder and shake. Now might be a good time to leave.



SCREEN 4

The four heroes discuss their plight and realise that it's going to be virtually impossible to escape the tower before it eventually collapses. As debris falls all around them they begin to look everywhere and anywhere for a potential exit.



SCREEN 5

In the best *Dungeons & Dragons* tradition, the keen-eyed Elf realises that the Lich's throne is an actual teleporter. The four heroes are therefore able to escape. Capcom rubs its hands with glee and then begins its work on *Shadow Over Mystara*.